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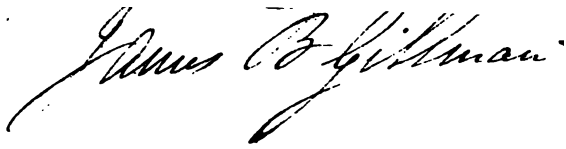
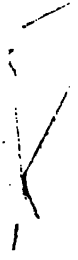


A

DISSERTATION

ON

MIRACLES.



A

DISSERTATION

ON

MIRACLES;

CONTAINING

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PRINCIPLES ADVANCED BY DAVID HUME, Esq.

IN AN ESSAY ON MIRACLES.

By GEORGE CAMPBELL, D.D.
LATE PRINCIPAL OF THE MARISCHAL COLLEGE, AND ONE OF THE MINISTERS OF ABERDEEN.

The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me.
JOHN X, 25.

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TO

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JOHN EARL OF BUTE,

ONE OF HIS MAJESTY'S PRINCIPAL SECRETARIES OF STATE,

CHANCELLOR OF THE MARISCHAL COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN,

THE FOLLOWING DISSERTATION,

IN DEFENCE OF A RELIGION, OF WHICH HE IS AN EMINENT PATRON AND EXAMPLE,

IS,

WITH THE UTMOST RESPECT AND GRATITUDE,

INSCRIBED BY

HIS LORDSHIP'S

MOST DUTIFUL, MOST DEVOTED, AND MOST HUMBLE SERVANT,

GEORGE CAMPBELL.

March 2, 1762.

ADVERTISEMENT.

It is not the only, nor even the chief design of these sheets, to refute the reasoning and objections of Mr. Hume, with regard to miracles: the chief design of them is, to set the principal argument for Christianity in its proper light. On a subject that hath been so often treated, it is impossible to avoid saying many things which have been said before. It may, however, with reason, be affirmed, that there still remains, on this subject, great scope for new observations. Besides, it ought to be remembered, that the evidence of any complex argument depends very much on the order into which the material circumstances are digested, and the manner in which they are displayed.

The *Essay on Miracles* deserves to be considered as one of the most dangerous attacks that have been made on our religion. The danger results not solely from the merit of THE PIECE; it results much

more from that of THE AUTHOR. *The piece* itself, like every other work of Mr. Hume, is ingenious; but its merit is more of the oratorial kind than of the philosophical. The merit of *the author*, I acknowledge, is great. The many useful volumes he hath published, of *history*, as well as on *criticism*, *politics*, and *trade*, have justly procured him, with all persons of taste and discernment, the highest reputation as a writer. What pity is it, that this reputation should have been sullied by attempts to undermine the foundations both of *natural religion*, and of *revealed!*

For my own part, I think it a piece of justice in me, to acknowledge the obligations I owe the author, before I enter on the proposed examination. I have not only been much entertained and instructed by his works; but, if I am possessed of any talent in abstract reasoning, I am not a little indebted to what he hath written on *human nature*, for the improvement of that talent. If therefore, in this tract, I have refuted Mr. Hume's

Essay, the greater share of the merit is perhaps to be ascribed to Mr. Hume himself. The compliment which the Russian monarch, after the famous battle of Poltowa, paid the Swedish generals, when he gave them the honourable appellation of his *masters in the art of war*, I may, with great sincerity, pay my acute and ingenious adversary.

I shall add a few things concerning the occasion and form of the following dissertation.

Some of the principal topics here discussed, were more briefly treated in a *sermon* preached before the *synod* of ABERDEEN, and are now made public at their desire. To the end that an argument of so great importance might be more fully and freely canvassed, than it could have been, with propriety, in a sermon, it was judged necessary to new-model the discourse, and to give it that form in which it now appears.

The *edition* of Mr. Hume's Essays to which I always refer in this work, is that printed at London, in duodecimo, 1750,

entitled, *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding.* I have, since finishing this tract, seen a later *edition*, in which there are few *variations*. None of them appeared to me so material, as to give ground for altering the *quotations* and *references* here used. There is indeed one *alteration*, which candour required that I should mention: I have accordingly mentioned it in a note.*

The *arguments* of the essayist I have endeavoured to refute by *argument*. Mere *declamation* I know no way of refuting, but by *analysing* it; nor do I conceive how *inconsistencies* can be answered, otherwise than by *exposing* them. In such *analysis* and *exposition*, which, I own, I have attempted without ceremony or reserve, an air of *ridicule* is unavoidable: but this *ridicule*, I am well aware, if founded in *misrepresentation*, will at last rebound upon *myself*. It is possible, that, in some things, I have *mistaken* the author's meaning; I am conscious, that I have not, in any thing, designedly *misrepresented* it.

* Page 171, 172.

CONTENTS.

INTRODUCTION, ... Page 1

PART I.

Miracles are capable of proof from testimony, and Religious Miracles are not less capable of this evidence than others.

SECT. I. *Mr. Hume's favourite argument is founded on a false hypothesis,* 7

SECT. II. *Mr. Hume charged with some fallacies in his way of managing the argument,* 33

SECT. III. *Mr. Hume himself gives up his favourite argument,* 53

SECT. IV. *There is no peculiar presumption against such miracles as are said to have been wrought in support of religion,* 60

SECT. V. *There is a peculiar presumption in favour of such miracles as are said to have been wrought in support of religion,* 73

SECT. VI. *Inquiry into the meaning and propriety of one of Mr. Hume's favourite maxims,* 76

PART II.

The Miracles on which the belief of Christianity is founded sufficiently attested.

SECT. I. *There is no presumption arising from human nature against the miracles said to have been wrought in proof of Christianity,* . . . . Page 84

SECT. II. *There is no presumption arising from the history of mankind, against the miracles said to have been wrought in proof of Christianity,* . 97

SECT. III. *No miracles recorded by historians of other religions are subversive of the evidence arising from the miracles wrought in proof of Christianity, or can be considered as contrary testimony,* . 132

SECT. IV. *Examination of the* PAGAN *miracles mentioned by Mr. Hume,* 147

SECT. V. *Examination of the* POPISH *miracles mentioned by Mr. Hume,* 170

SECT. VI. *Abstracting from the evidence for particular facts, we have irrefragable evidence that there have been miracles in former times; or such events as, when compared with the present constitution of the world, would by Mr. Hume be denominated miraculous,* 203

SECT. VII. *Revisal of Mr. Hume's examination of the Pentateuch,* 214

Conclusion, ... 230

INTRODUCTION.

"CHRISTIANITY," it hath been said, "is not "founded in argument." If it were only meant by these words, that the religion of Jesus could not, by the single aid of reasoning, produce its full effect upon the heart, every true Christian would cheerfully subscribe to them. No arguments unaccompanied by the influences of the Holy Spirit, can convert the soul from sin to God; though even to such conversion, arguments are, by the agency of the Spirit, rendered subservient. Again, if we were to understand, by this aphorism, that the principles of our religion could never have been discovered, by the natural and unassisted faculties of man; this position, I presume, would be as little disputed as the former. But if, on the contrary, under the cover of an ambiguous expression, it is intend-

ed to insinuate, that those principles, from their very nature, can admit no rational evidence of their truth, (and this, by the way, is the only meaning which can avail our antagonists), the gospel, as well as common sense, loudly reclaims against it.

The Lord Jesus Christ, the author of our religion, often argued, both with his disciples and with his adversaries, as with reasonable men, on the principles of reason. Without this faculty, he well knew, they could not be susceptible either of religion or of law. He argued from prophecy, and the conformity of the event to the prediction.* He argued from the testimony of John the Baptist, who was generally acknowledged to be a prophet.† He argued from the miracles which he himself performed,‡ as uncontrovertible evidences, that God Almighty operated by him, and had sent him. He expostulates with his enemies that they did not use their reason on this subject. *Why*, says

* Luke xxiv, 25, &c. John v, 39 & 46. † John v, 32, 33. ‡ John v, 36, x, 25, 37, 38, xiv, 10, 11.

he, *even of yourselves, judge ye not what is right?* ‖ In like manner, we are called upon by the apostles of our Lord, to act the part of *wise men*, and *judge* impartially of *what* they *say*. § Those who do so, are highly commended, for the candour and prudence they discover, in an affair of so great consequence. * We are even commanded to be *always ready to give an answer to every man that asketh* us *a reason of* our *hope*; † *in meekness to instruct them that oppose tnemselves*; ‡ and *earnestly to contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints*. ‖ God has neither in natural nor revealed religion, *left himself without a witness*; but has in both given moral and external evidence, sufficient to convince the impartial, to silence the gainsayer, and to render inexcusable the atheist and the unbeliever. This evidence it is our duty to attend to, and candidly to examine. We must *prove all things*, as we are expressly enjoined

‖ Luke xii, 57. § 1 Cor. x, 15. * Acts xvii, 11.
† 1 Peter iii, 15. ‡ 2 Tim. ii, 25. ‖ Jude 3.

in holy writ, if we would ever hope to *hold fast that which is good.* §

Thus much I thought proper to premise, not to serve as an apology for the design of this tract (the design surely needs no apology, whatever the world may judge of the execution), but to expose the shallowness of that pretext, under which the advocates for infidelity in this age commonly take shelter. Whilst, therefore, we enforce an argument, which, in support of our religion, was so frequently insisted on by its divine founder, we will not dread the reproachful titles of *dangerous friends*, or *disguised enemies* of revelation. Such are the titles, which the writer, whose sentiments we propose in these papers to canvass, hath bestowed on his antagonists; * not, I believe, through malice against them, but as a sort of excuse for himself, or at least a handle for introducing a very strange and unmeaning compliment to the religion of his country, after a very bold attempt to undermine it. We will, however, do

§ 1 Thess. v. 21. * P. 204.

him the justice to own, that he hath put it out of our power to retort the charge. No intelligent person, who hath carefully perused the *Essay on Miracles*, will impute to the author either of those ignominious characters.

My *primary* intention in undertaking an answer to the aforesaid essay, hath invariably been, to contribute all in my power, to the defence of a *religion*, which I esteem the greatest blessing conferred by Heaven on the sons of men. It is at the same time a *secondary* motive of considerable weight, to vindicate *philosophy*, at least that most important branch of it which ascertains the rules of reasoning, from those absurd consequences, which this author's theory naturally leads us to. The theme is arduous. The adversary is both subtle and powerful. With such an adversary, I should on very unequal terms enter the lists, had I not the advantage of being on the side of truth. And an eminent advantage this doubtless is. It requires but moderate abilities to speak in defence of a

good cause. A good cause demands but a distinct exposition and a fair hearing; and we may say with great propriety, it will speak for itself. But to adorn error with the semblance of truth, and *make the worse appear the better reason*, requires all the arts of ingenuity and invention; arts in which few or none have been more expert than Mr. Hume. It is much to be regretted, that on some occasions he hath so ill applied them.

A DISSERTATION ON MIRACLES.

PART I.

MIRACLES ARE CAPABLE OF PROOF FROM TESTIMONY, AND RELIGIOUS MIRACLES ARE NOT LESS CAPABLE OF THIS EVIDENCE THAN OTHERS.

SECT. I.

Mr. Hume's favourite argument is founded on a falſe hypotheſis.

It is not the aim of this author to evince, that miracles, if admitted to be true, would not be a ſufficient evidence of a divine miſſion. His deſign is ſolely to prove, that miracles which have not been the objects of our own ſenſes, at leaſt ſuch as are ſaid to have been performed in attestation of any religious ſyſtem, cannot reaſonably be admitted by us, or believed on the teſtimony of others. "A

for brevity's sake, to compendise the reasoning, and to omit whatever is said merely for illustration. To do otherwise would lay me under the necessity of transcribing the greater part of the essay.

"Experience," says he, "is our only guide "in reasoning concerning matters of fact. * "Experience is in some things variable, in "some things uniform. A variable experi- "ence gives rise only to probability; an "uniform experience amounts to a proof. † "Probability always supposes an opposition "of experiments and observations, where the "one side is found to overbalance the other, "and to produce a degree of evidence pro- "portioned to the superiority. In such cases "we must balance the opposite experiments, "and deduct the lesser number from the "greater, in order to know the exact force "of the superior evidence. ‡ Our belief or "assurance of any fact from the report of "eye-witnesses, is derived from no other "principle than experience; that is, our ob- "servation of the veracity of human testi- "mony, and of the usual conformity of facts "to the reports of witnesses ‖. Now, if the "fact attested partakes of the marvellous, if

* P. 174. † P. 175, 176. ‡ P. 176. ‖ Ibid.

" it is such as has seldom fallen under our " observation, here is a contest of two oppo- " site experiences, of which the one destroys " the other, as far as its force goes, and the " superior can only operate on the mind by " the force which remains. The very same " principle of experience, which gives us a " certain degree of assurance, in the testi- " mony of witnesses, gives us also, in this " case, another degree of assurance, against " the fact which they endeavour to establish; " from which contradiction, there necessarily " arises a counterpoise, and mutual destruc- " tion of belief and authority.* Further, if " the fact affirmed by the witnesses, instead " of being only marvellous, is really mira- " culous; if besides, the testimony consider- " ed apart and in itself, amounts to an entire " proof; in that case there is proof against " proof, of which the strongest must prevail, " but still with a diminution of its force, in " proportion to that of its antagonist. A " miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; " and as a firm and unalterable experience " has established these laws, the proof against " a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, " is as entire, as any argument from experi-

* P. 179.

"ence can possibly be imagined.* And if "so, it is an undeniable consequence, that it "cannot be surmounted by any proof what-"ever from testimony. A miracle, there-"fore, however attested, can never be ren-"dered credible, even in the lowest degree." This, in my apprehension, is the sum of the argument, on which my ingenious opponent rests the strength of his cause.

In answer to this, I propose first to prove, that the whole is built upon a false hypothesis. That the evidence of testimony is derived solely from experience, which seems to be an axiom of this writer, is at least not so incontestible a truth as he supposes it; that on the contrary, testimony hath a natural and original influence on belief, antecedent to experience, will, I imagine, easily be evinced. For this purpose, let it be remarked, that the earliest assent, which is given to testimony by children, and which is previous to all experience, is in fact the most unlimited; that by a gradual experience of mankind, it is gradually contracted, and reduced to narrower bounds. To say, therefore, that our diffidence in testimony is the result of experience, is

* P. 180.

more philosophical, because more consonant to truth, than to say that our faith in testimony has this foundation. Accordingly, youth, which is unexperienced, is credulous; age, on the contrary, is distrustful. Exactly the reverse would be the case, were this author's doctrine just.

Perhaps it will be said, if experience is allowed to be the only measure of a logical or reasonable faith in testimony, the question, *whether the influence of testimony on belief, be original or derived?* if it is not merely verbal, is at least of no importance in the present controversy. But I maintain it is of the greatest importance. The difference between us is by no means so inconsiderable, as to a careless view it may appear. According to his philosophy, the presumption is against the testimony, or (which amounts to the same thing) there is not the smallest presumption in its favour, till properly supported by experience. According to the explication given above, there is the strongest presumption in favour of the testimony, till properly refuted by experience.

If it be objected by the author, that such a faith in testimony as is prior to experience, must be unreasonable and unphilosophical,

because unaccountable; I should reply, that there are, and must be, in human nature, some original grounds of belief, beyond which our researches cannot proceed, and of which, therefore, it is vain to attempt a rational account. I shall desire the objector to give a reasonable account of his faith in this principle, that *similar causes always produce similar effects*; or in this, that *the course of nature will be the same to-morrow that it was yesterday, and is to-day*: principles, which he himself acknowledges, are neither intuitively evident, nor deduced from premises; and which nevertheless we are under a necessity of presupposing, in all our reasonings from experience.* I should desire him to give a reasonable account of his faith in the clearest informations of his memory, which he will find it alike impossible either to doubt or to explain. Indeed memory bears nearly the same relation to experience, that testimony does. Certain it is, that the defects and misrepresentations of memory are often corrected by experience. Yet, should any person hence infer, that memory derives all its evidence from experience, he would fall into a manifest absurdity. For, on the contrary, experi-

* Sceptical Doubts, Part

ence derives its origin solely from memory, and is nothing else but the general maxims or conclusions we have formed, from the comparison of particular facts remembered. If we had not previously given an implicit faith to memory, we had never been able to acquire experience. When, therefore, we say that memory, which gives birth to experience, may, nevertheless, in some instances, be corrected by experience, no more is implied, but that the inferences formed from the most lively and perspicuous reports of memory, sometimes serve to rectify the mistakes which arise from such reports of this faculty as are most languid and confused. Thus, memory, in these instances, may be said to correct itself. The case is often much the same with experience and testimony, as will appear more clearly in the second section, where I shall consider the ambiguity of the word *experience*, as used by this author.

But how, says Mr. Hume, is testimony then to be refuted? Principally in one or other of these two ways: *first*, and most directly, by contradictory testimony; that is, when an equal or greater number of witnesses, equally or more credible, attest the contrary: *se-*

condly, by such evidence either of the incapacity or baseness of the witnesses, as is sufficient to discredit them. What, rejoins my antagonist, cannot then testimony be confuted by the extraordinary nature of the fact attested? Has this consideration no weight at all? That this consideration hath no weight at all, it was never my intention to maintain; that by itself it can very rarely, if ever, amount to a refutation against ample and unexceptionable testimony, I hope to make extremely plain. Who hath ever denied, that the uncommonness of an event related, is a presumption against its reality; and that chiefly on account of the tendency, which, experience teacheth us, and this author hath observed, some people have to sacrifice truth to the love of wonder?* The question only is, how far does does this presumption extend? In the extent which Mr. Hume hath assigned it, he hath greatly exceeded the limits of nature, and consequently of all just reasoning.

In his opinion, "when the fact attested "is such as has seldom fallen under our ob- "servation, there is a contest of two oppo- "site experiences, of which the one destroys

* P. 184.

"the other, as far as its force goes, and the "superior can only operate on the mind, by "the force which remains."* There is a metaphysical, I had almost said, a magical *balance* and *arithmetic*, for the weighing and subtracting of evidence, to which he frequently recurs, and with which he seems to fancy he can perform wonders. I wish he had been a little more explicit in teaching us how these rare inventions must be used. When a writer of genius and elocution expresses himself in general terms, he will find it an easy matter, to give a plausible appearance to things the most unintelligible in nature. Such sometimes is this author's way of writing. In the instance before us he is particularly happy in his choice of metaphors. They are such as are naturally adapted to prepossess a reader in his favour. What candid person can think of suspecting the impartiality of an inquirer, who is for *weighing* in the *scales* of reason, all the arguments on either side? Who can suspect his exactness who determines every thing by a *numerical computation?* Hence it is, that to a superficial view his reasoning appears scarce inferior to demonstration; but, when narrowly canvassed,

* P. 179.

it is impracticable to find an application, of which, in a consistency with good sense, it is capable.

In confirmation of the remark just now made, let us try how his manner of arguing on this point can be applied to a particular instance. For this purpose I make the following supposition. I have lived for some years near a ferry. It consists with my knowledge that the passage-boat has a thousand times crossed the river, and as many times returned safe. An unknown man, whom I have just now met, tells me in a serious manner, that it is lost; and affirms, that he himself standing on the bank, was a spectator of the scene; that he saw the passengers carried down the stream, and the boat overwhelmed. No person, who is influenced in his judgment of things, not by philosophical subtilties, but by common sense, a much surer guide, will hesitate to declare, that in such a testimony I have probable evidence of the fact asserted. But if leaving common sense, I shall recur to metaphysics, and submit to be tutored in my way of judging by the essayist, he will remind me, "that there is here a contest of two opposite experiences, of which the one destroys the other, as far as its force goes,

" and the superior can only operate on the " mind by the force which remains." I am warned, that " the very same principle of " experience, which gives me a certain de- " gree of assurance in the testimony of the " witness, gives me also, in this case, another " degree of assurance, against the fact, which " he endeavours to establish, from which con- " tradiction there arises a counterpoise, and " mutual destruction of belief and authori- " ty."* Well, I would know the truth, if possible; and that I may conclude fairly and philosophically, how must I balance these opposite experiences, as you are pleased to term them? must I set the thousand, or rather the two thousand instances of the one side, against the single instance of the other? In that case, it is easy to see, I have nineteen hundred and ninety-nine degrees of evidence, that my information is false. Or is it necessary, in order to make it credible, that the single instance have two thousand times as much evidence, as any of the opposite instances, supposing them equal among themselves; or supposing them unequal, as much as all the two thousand put together, that there may be at least an equilibrium: this

* P. 179.

is impossible. I had for some of those instances, the evidence of sense, which hardly any testimony can equal, much less exceed. Once more must the evidence I have of the veracity of the witness be a full equivalent to the two thousand instances which oppose the fact attested? By the supposition, I have no positive evidence for or against his veracity, he being a person whom I never saw before. Yet if none of these be the balancing, which the essay writer means, I despair of being able to discover his meaning.

Is then so weak a proof from testimony incapable of being refuted? I am far from thinking so; though even so weak a proof could not be overturned by such a contrary experience. How then may it be overturned? *First*, by contradictory testimony. Going homewards I meet another person, whom I knew as little as I did the former; finding that he comes from the ferry, I ask him concerning the truth of the report. He affirms, that the whole is a fiction; that he saw the boat, and all in it, come safe to land. This would do more to turn the scale, than fifty thousand such contrary instances, as were supposed. Yet this would not remove suspicion. Indeed, if we were to consider the matter ab-

stractly, one would think, that all suspicion would be removed, that the two opposite testimonies would destroy each other, and leave the mind entirely under the influence of its former experience, in the same state as if neither testimony had been given. But this is by no means consonant to fact. When once testimonies are introduced, former experience is generally of no account in the reckoning; it is but like the dust of the balance, which hath not any sensible effect upon the scales. The mind hangs in suspence between the two contrary declarations, and considers it as one to one, or equal in probability, that the report is true or that it is false. Afterwards a third, and a fourth, and a fifth, confirm the declaration of the second. I am then quite at ease. Is this the only effectual way of confuting false testimony? No. I suppose *again*, that instead of meeting with any person who can inform me concerning the fact, I get from some, who are acquainted with the witness, information concerning his character. They tell me he is notorious for lying; and that his lies are commonly forged, not with a view to interest, but merely to gratify a malicious pleasure, which he takes in alarming strangers. This, though not so direct a refut-

ation as the former, will be sufficient to discredit his report. In the former, where there is testimony contradicting testimony, the author's metaphor of a balance may be used with propriety. The things weighed are homogenial: and when contradictory evidences are presented to the mind, tending to prove positions which cannot be both true, the mind must decide on the comparative strength of the opposite evidences, before it yield to either.

But is this the case in the supposition first made? By no means. The two thousand instances formerly known, and the single instance attested, as they relate to different facts, though of a contrary nature, are not contradictory. There is no inconsistency in believing both. There is no inconsistency in receiving the last on weaker evidence (if it be sufficient evidence), not only than all the former together, but even than any of them singly. Will it be said, that though the former instances are not themselves contradictory to the fact recently attested, they lead to a conclusion that is contradictory? I answer, It is true, that the experienced frequency of the conjunction of any two events, leads the mind to infer a similar conjunction

in time to come. But let it at the same time be remarked, that no man considers this inference, as having equal evidence with any one of those past events, on which it is founded, and for the belief of which we have had sufficient testimony. Before, then, the method recommended by this author can turn to any account, it will be necessary for him to compute and determine with precision, how many hundreds, how many thousands, I might say, how many myriads of instances will confer such evidence on the conclusion founded on them, as will prove an equipoise for the testimony of one ocular witness, a man of probity, in a case of which he is allowed to be a competent judge.

There is in *arithmetic* a rule called REDUCTION, by which numbers of different denominations are brought to the same denomination. If this ingenious author shall invent a rule in *logic*, analogous to this, for reducing different classes of evidence to the same class, he will bless the world with a most important discovery. Then, indeed, he will have the honour to establish an everlasting peace in the republic of letters; then we shall have the happiness to see controversy of every kind, theological, historical, philosophical, receive

its mortal wound: for though, in every question, we could not even then determine with certainty, on which side the truth lay, we could always determine (and that is the utmost the nature of the thing admits) with as much accuracy as geometry and algebra can afford, on which side the probability lay, and in what degree. But till this metaphysical *reduction* is discovered, it will be impossible, where the evidences are of different orders, to ascertain by *subtraction* the superior evidence. We could not but esteem him a novice in arithmetic, who being asked whether seven pounds or eleven pence make the greatest sum, and what is the difference? should, by attending solely to the numbers, and overlooking the value, conclude that eleven pence were the greater, and that it exceeded the other by four. Must we not be equal novices in reasoning, if we follow the same absurd method? Must we not fall into as great blunders? Of as little significancy do we find the balance. Is the value of things heterogeneal to be determined merely by weight? Shall silver be weighed against lead, or copper against iron? If in exchange for a piece of gold, I were offered some counters of baser metal, is it not obvious, that till I know the

comparative value of the metals, in vain shall I attempt to find what is equivalent, by the assistance either of scales or arithmetic?

It is an excellent observation, and much to the purpose, which the late learned and pious bishop of Durham, in his admirable performance on the analogy of religion to the course of nature, hath made on this subject. "There is a very strong presumption," says he, "against the most ordinary facts, be- "fore the proof of them, which yet is over- "come by almost any proof. There is a pre- "sumption of millions to one against the "story of Cæsar, or of any other man. For "suppose a number of common facts, so "and so circumstanced, of which one had "no kind of proof, should happen to come "into one's thoughts, every one would, with- "out any possible doubt, conclude them to "be false. The like may be said of a single "common fact."* What then, I may subjoin, shall be said of an uncommon fact? And that an uncommon fact may be proved by testimony, hath not *yet* been made a question. But, in order to illustrate the observation above cited, suppose, first, one at random mentions, that at such an hour,

* Part 2, chap. 2, § 3.

of such a day, in such a part of the heavens, a comet *will* appear; the conclusion from experience would not be as millions, but as infinite to one, that the proposition is false. Instead of this, suppose you have the testimony of but one ocular witness, a man of integrity, and skilled in astronomy, that at such an hour, of such a day, in such a part of the heavens, a comet *did* appear; you will not hesitate one moment to give him credit. Yet all the presumption that was against the truth of the first supposition, though almost as strong evidence as experience can afford, was also against the truth of the second, before it was thus attested.

Is it necessary to argue farther, in support of this doctrine, that as the water in the canal cannot be made to rise higher than the fountain whence it flows, so it is impossible, that the evidence of testimony, if it proceeded from experience, should ever exceed that of experience, which is its source? yet that it greatly exceeds this evidence, appears not only from what hath been observed already, but still more, from what I shall have occasion to observe in the sequel. One may safely affirm, that no conceivable con-

clusion from experience, can possess stronger evidence, than that which ascertains us of the regular succession and duration of day and night. The reason is the instances on which this experience is founded, are both without number and without exception. Yet even this conclusion, the author admits, as we shall see in the third section, may, in a particular instance, not only be surmounted, but even annihilated, by testimony.

Lastly, let it be observed, that the immediate conclusion from experience is always *general*, and runs thus: "This is the ordi- "nary course of nature." "Such an event "may reasonably be expected, where all the "circumstances are entirely similar." But when we descend to particulars, the conclusion becomes weaker, being more indirect. For though all the *known* circumstances be similar, all the *actual* circumstances may not be similar: nor is it possible in any case to be assured (our knowledge of things being at best but superficial), that all the *actual* circumstances are *known* to us. On the contrary, the direct conclusion from testimony is always *particular*, and runs thus: "This is the fact in such an in- "dividual instance." The remark now made

will serve both to throw light on some of the preceding observations, and to indicate the proper sphere of each species of evidence. *Experience* of the past is the only rule whereby we can judge concerning the *future:* And as when the sun is below the horizon, we must do the best we can by the light of the moon, or even of the stars; so in all cases where we have no testimony, we are under a necessity of recurring to experience, and of balancing or numbering contrary observations.* But the evidence resulting hence, even in the clearest cases, is

* Wherever such balancing or numbering can take place, the opposite evidences must be entirely similar. It will rarely assist us in judging of facts supported by testimony; for even where contradictory testimonies come to be considered, you will hardly find, that the characters of the witnesses on the opposite sides are so precisely equal, as that an arithmetical operation will evolve the credibility. In matters of pure experience it hath often place. Hence the computations that have been made of the value of annuities, insurances, and several other commercial articles. In calculations concerning chances, the degree of probability may be determined with mathematical exactness. I shall here take the liberty, though the matter be not essential to the design of this tract, to correct an oversight in the essayist, who always supposes, that where contrary evidences must be balanced, the probability lies in the remainder or surplus, when the less number is subtracted

acknowledged to be so weak, compared with that which results from testimony, that the strongest conviction, built merely on the former, may be overturned by the slightest proof exhibited by the latter. Accordingly, the future hath, in all ages and nations, been denominated the province of conjecture and uncertainty.

From what hath been said, the attentive reader will easily discover, that the author's argument against *miracles*, hath not the least affinity to the argument used by Dr. Tillotson against *transubstantiation*, with which Mr. Hume hath introduced his subject. Let

from the greater. The probability doth not consist in the surplus, but in the ratio, or geometrical proportion, which the numbers on the opposite sides bear to each other. I explain myself thus: In favour of one supposed event, there are 100 similar instances, against it 50. In another case under consideration, the favourable instances are 60, and only ten unfavourable. Though the difference, or arithmetical proportion, which is 50, be the same in both cases, the probability is by no means equal, as the author's way of reasoning implies. The probability of the first event is as 100 to 50, or 2 to 1. The probability of the second is as 60 to 10, or 6 to 1. Consequently, on comparing the different examples, though both be probable, the second is thrice as probable as the first.

us hear the argument, as it is related in the essay, from the writings of the archbishop. "It is acknowledged on all hands," says that learned prelate, "that the authority either of "the scripture or of tradition, is founded "merely on the testimony of the apostles, "who were eye-witnesses to those miracles of "our Saviour, by which he proved his di- "vine mission. Our evidence, then, for the "truth of the christian religion, is less "than the evidence for the truth of our "senses; because, even in the first authors "of our religion, it was no greater; and "it is evident, it must diminish in passing "from them to their disciples; nor can any "one be so certain of the truth of their "testimony, as of the immediate objects of "his senses. But a weaker evidence can "never destroy a stronger; and therefore, "were the doctrine of the real presence "ever so clearly revealed in scripture, it "were directly contrary to the rules of just "reasoning, to give our assent to it. It "contradicts sense, though both the scrip- "ture and tradition, on which it is supposed "to be built, carry not such evidence with "them as sense, when they are considered "merely as external evidences, and are not

"brought home to every one's breast, by "the immediate operation of the Holy Spi- "rit."* That the evidence of *testimony* is less than the evidence of *sense*, is undeniable. *Sense* is the source of that evidence, which is first transferred to the *memory* of the individual, as to a general reservoir, and thence transmitted to others by the channel of *testimony*. That the original evidence can never gain any thing, but must lose, by the transmission, is beyond dispute. What hath been rightly perceived may be misremembered; what is rightly remembered may, through incapacity, or through ill intention, be misreported; and what is rightly reported may be misunderstood. In any of these four ways, therefore, either by defect of memory, of elocution, or of veracity in the relater, or by misapprehension in the hearer, there is a chance, that the truth received by the information of the senses, may be misrepresented or mistaken; now every such chance occasions a real diminution of the evidence. That the sacramental elements are bread and wine, not flesh and blood, our sight and touch, and taste and smell, concur in testifying. If

* P. 173, 174.

these senses are not to be credited, the apostles themselves could not have evidence of the mission of their master. For the greatest external evidence they had, or could have, of his mission, was that which their senses gave them, of the reality of his miracles. But whatever strength there is in this argument with regard to the apostles, the argument with regard to us, who, for those miracles, have only the evidence, not of our own senses, but of their testimony, is incomparably stronger. In their case, it is sense contradicting sense; in ours, it is sense contradicting testimony. But what relation has this to the author's argument? None at all. Testimony, it is acknowledged, is a weaker evidence than sense. But it hath been already evinced, that its evidence for particular facts is infinitely stronger than that which the general conclusions from experience can afford us. Testimony holds directly of memory and sense. Whatever is duly attested must be remembered by the witness; whatever is duly remembered must once have been perceived. But nothing similar takes place with regard to experience, nor can

testimony, with any appearance of meaning, be said to hold of it.

THUS I have shewn, as I proposed, that the author's reasoning proceeds on a false hypothesis.——It supposes testimony to derive its evidence solely from experience, which is false.——It supposeth by consequence, that contrary observations have a weight in opposing testimony, which the first and most acknowledged principles of human reason, or, if you like the term better, common sense, evidently shews that they have not.—It assigns a rule for discovering the superiority of contrary evidences, which, in the latitude there given it, tends to mislead the judgment, and which it is impossible, by any explication, to render of real use.

SECT. II.

Mr. Hume charged with some fallacies in his way of managing the argument.

IN the essay there is frequent mention of the word *experience*, and much use made of it. It is strange that the author hath not favoured us with the definition of a term of

so much moment to his argument. This defect I shall endeavour to supply; and the rather, as the word appears to be equivocal, and to be used by the essayist in two very different senses. The first and most proper signification of the word, which, for distinction's sake, I shall call *personal* experience, is that given in the preceding section. "It "is," as was observed, "founded in *memory*, "and consists solely of the general maxims "or conclusions, that each individual hath "formed, from the comparison of the par- "ticular facts he hath remembered." In the other signification, in which the word is sometimes taken, and which I shall distinguish by the term *derived*, it may be thus defined: "It is founded in *testimony*, and consists "not only of all the experiences of others, "which have through that channel been "communicated to us, but of all the general "maxims or conclusions we have formed, "from the comparison of particular facts at- "tested."

In proposing his argument, the author would surely be understood to mean only *personal* experience; otherwise, his making testimony derive its light from an experience which derives its light from testimony,

would be introducing what logicians term a *circle in causes*. It would exhibit the same things alternately, as causes and effects of each other. Yet nothing can be more limited than the sense which is conveyed under the term *experience*, in the first acceptation. The merest clown or peasant derives incomparably more knowledge from testimony, and the communicated experience of others, than, in the longest life, he could have amassed out of the treasure of his own memory. Nay, to such a scanty portion the savage himself is not confined. If that, therefore, must be the rule, the only rule, by which every testimony is ultimately to be judged, our belief in matters of fact must have very narrow bounds. No testimony ought to have any weight with us, that doth not relate an event, similar at least to some one observation which we ourselves have had access to make. For example, that there are such people on the earth as negroes, could not, on that hypothesis, be rendered credible to one who had never seen a negro, not even by the most numerous and the most unexceptionable attestations. Against the admission of such testimony, however strong, the whole force of the author's argument evi-

dently operates. But that innumerable absurdities would flow from this principle, I might easily evince, did I not think the task superfluous.

The author himself is aware of the consequences; and therefore, in whatever sense he uses the term *experience* in proposing his argument, in prosecuting it, he with great dexterity shifts the sense, and ere the reader is apprised, insinuates another. "It is a miracle," says he, "that a dead man should "come to life, because that has never been "observed in any age or country. There "must therefore be an uniform experience "against every miraculous event, otherwise the event would not merit that appellation."* Here the phrase, *an uniform experience against an event*, in the latter clause, is implicitly defined in the former, not what has never been observed by us, but (mark his words) *what has never been observed* IN ANY AGE OR COUNTRY. Now, what has been observed, and what has not been observed, in all ages and countries, pray how can you, Sir, or I, or any man, come to the knowledge of? Only, I suppose, by

* P. 181.

testimony, oral or written. The personal experience of every individual is limited to but a part of one age, and commonly to a narrow spot of one country. If there be any other way of being made acquainted with facts, it is to me, I own, an impenetrable secret; I have no apprehension of it. If there be not any, what shall we make of that cardinal point, on which his argument turns? It is in plain language, "Tes-"timony is not entitled to the least degree "of faith, but as far as it is supported by "such an extensive experience, as if we had "not had a previous and independent faith "in testimony, we could never have acquir-"ed."

How natural is the transition from one sophism to another! You will soon be convinced of this, if you attend but a little to the strain of the argument. "A miracle," says he, "is a violation of the laws of na-"ture; and as a firm and unalterable ex-"perience hath established these laws, the "proof against a miracle is as entire as any "argument from experience can possibly be "imagined."* Again, "as an uniform

* P. 180.

"experience amounts to a proof, there is "here a direct and full proof, from the na- "ture of the fact, against the existence of "any miracle."* I must once more ask the author, what is the precise meaning of the words *firm, unalterable, uniform*? An experience that admits no exception, is surely the only experience, which can, with propriety, be termed *uniform, firm, unalterable.* Now since, as was remarked above, the far greater part of this experience, which compriseth every age and every country, must be derived to us from testimony; that the experience may be *firm, uniform, unalterable*, there must be no contrary testimony whatever. Yet by the author's own hypothesis, the miracles he would thus confute, are supported by testimony. At the same time, to give strength to his argument, he is under a necessity of supposing, that there is no exception from the testimonies against them. Thus, he falls into that paralogism, which is called *begging the question.* What he gives with one hand, he takes with the other. He admits, in opening his design, what in his argument he implicitly denies.

* P. 181.

But that this, if possible, may be still more manifest, let us attend a little to some expressions, which one would imagine he had inadvertently dropt. "So long," says he, "as the world endures, I presume, will the "accounts of miracles and prodigies be "found in all profane history." * Why does he presume so? A man so much attached to experience, can hardly be suspected to have any other reason than this; because such accounts have hitherto been found in all the histories, profane as well as sacred, of times past. But we need not recur to an inference to obtain this acknowledgment. It is often to be met with in the essay. In one place we learn, that the witnesses for miracles are an infinite number; † in another, that all religious records, of whatever kind, abound with them.‡ I leave it therefore to the author to explain, with what consistency he can assert, that the laws of nature are established by an uniform experience (which experience is chiefly the result of testimony), and at the same time allow, that almost all human histories are full of the relations of miracles, and prodigies, which are violations of those

* P. 174. † P. 190. ‡ P. 191.

laws. Here is, by his own confession, testimony against testimony, and very ample on both sides. How then can one side claim a firm, uniform, and unalterable support from testimony?

It will be in vain to object, that the testimony in support of the laws of nature, greatly exceeds the testimony for the violations of these laws; and that, if we are to be determined by the greater number of observations, we shall reject all miracles whatever. I ask, why are the testimonies much more numerous in the one case than in the other? The answer is obvious: natural occurrences are much more frequent than such as are preternatural. But are all the accounts we have of the pestilence to be rejected as incredible, because, in this country, we hear not so often of that disease as of the fever? or, because the number of natural births is infinitely greater than that of monsters, shall the evidence of the former be regarded as a confutation of all that can be advanced in proof of the latter? Such an objector needs to be reminded of what was proved in the foregoing section; that the opposite testimonies relate to different facts, and are therefore not contra-

dictory; that the conclusion founded on them, possesseth not the evidence of the facts on which it is founded, but only such a presumptive evidence as may be surmounted by the slightest positive proof. A general conclusion from experience is in comparison but presumptive and indirect; sufficient testimony for a particular fact is direct and positive evidence.

I shall remark one other fallacy in this author's reasoning, before I conclude this section. "The Indian prince," says he, "who refused to believe the first relations "concerning the effects of frost, reasoned "justly; and it naturally required very "strong testimony to engage his assent to "facts, which arose from a state of nature, "with which he was unacquainted, and bore "so little analogy to those events, of which "he had had constant and uniform experi-"ence. Though they were not contrary "to his experience, they were not conform-"able to it." * Here a distinction is artfully suggested, between what is *contrary* to experience, and what is *not conformable* to it. The one he allows may be proved by testimony, but not the other. A distinc-

* P. 179.

tion, for which the author seems to have so great use, it will not be improper to examine.

If my reader happen to be but little acquainted with Mr. Hume's writings, or even with the piece here examined, I must entreat him, ere he proceed any farther, to give the essay an attentive perusal; and to take notice particularly, whether in one single passage he can find any other sense given to the terms *contrary to experience*, but that which has *not* been *experienced*. Without this aid, I should not be surprised, that I found it difficult to convince the judicious, that a man of so much acuteness, one so much a philosopher as this author, should with such formality, make a distinction, which not only the essay, but the whole tenor of his philosophical writings, shews evidently to have no meaning. Is that which is contrary to experience a synonymous phrase for that which implies a contradiction? If this were the case, there would be no need to recur to experience for a refutation; it would refute itself. But it is equitable that the author himself be heard, who ought to be the best interpreter of his own words. "When the fact attest-

" ed," says he, " is such a one as has seldom " fallen under our observation, here is a " contest of two opposite experiences." * In this passage, not the being *never* experienced, but even the being *seldom* experienced, constitutes an *opposite* experience. I can conceive no way but one, that the author can evade the force of this quotation; and that is, by obtruding on us some new distinction between an *opposite* and a *contrary* experience. In order to preclude such an attempt, I shall once more recur to his own authority. " 'Tis no miracle that a " man in seeming good health, should die " of a sudden." Why? " Because such a " kind of death, though more unusual than " any other, hath yet been frequently ob- " served to happen. But it is a miracle " that a dead man should come to life." Why? Not because of any inconsistency in the thing. That a body should be this hour inanimate, and the next animated, is no more inconsistent than the reverse, that it should be this hour animated, and the next inanimate; though the one be common, and not the other. But the author himself answers the question: " Because that has

* P. 179.

"never been observed in any age or coun-
"try." * All the contrariety then that there is in miracles to experience, doth, by his own concession, consist solely in this, that they have never been observed; that is, they are not conformable to experience. To his experience, personal or derived, he must certainly mean, to what he has had access to learn of different ages and countries. To speak beyond the knowledge he hath attained, would be ridiculous. It would be first supposing a miracle, and then inferring a contrary experience, instead of concluding from experience, that the fact is miraculous.

Now I insist, that as far as regards the author's argument, a fact perfectly unusual, or not conformable to our experience, such a fact as, for aught we have had access to learn, was never observed in any age or country, is as incapable of proof from testimony as miracles are; that, if this writer would argue consistently, he could never, on his own principles, reject the one and admit the other. Both ought to be rejected, or neither. I would not, by this, be thought to signify, that there is no differ-

* P. 181.

ence between a miracle and an extraordinary event. I know that the former implies the interposal of an invisible agent, which is not implied in the latter. All that I intend to assert is, that the author's argument equally affects them both. Why doth such interposal appear to him incredible? Not from any incongruity he discerns in the thing itself. He doth not pretend to it. But it is not conformable to his experience. "A miracle," says he, "is "a transgression of a law of nature." * But how are the laws or nature known to us? By experience. What is the criterion, whereby we must judge whether the laws of nature are transgressed? Solely the conformity or disconformity of events to our experience. This writer surely will not pretend, that we can have any knowledge *a priori*, either of the law or of the violation.

Let us then examine by his own principles, whether the king of Siam, of whom the story he alludes to is related by Locke, † could have sufficent evidence, from testi-

* P. 182. in the note.

† Essay on Human Understanding, Book 4, chap. 15, sect. 5.

mony, of a fact so contrary to his experience, as the freezing of water. He could just say as much of this event, as the author can say of a dead man's being restored to life. "Such a thing was never observed, "as far as I could learn, in any age or coun-"try." If the things themselves too are impartially considered, and independently of the notions acquired by us in these northern climates, we should account the first at least as extraordinary as the second. That so pliant a body as water should become hard like pavement, so as to bear up an elephant on its surface, is as unlikely in itself, as that a body inanimate to day, should be animated to-morrow. Nay, to the Indian monarch, I must think, that the first would appear more a miracle, more contrary to experience than the second. If he had been acquainted with ice or frozen water, and afterwards seen it become fluid, but had never seen nor learned, that after it was melted, it became hard again, the relation must have appeared marvellous, as the process from fluidity to hardness never had been experienced, though the reverse often had. But I believe nobody will question, that on this supposition it would not have appeared

quite so strange as it did. Yet this supposition makes the instance more parallel to the restoring of the dead to life. The process from animate to inanimate we are all acquainted with; and what is such a restoration, but the reversing of this process? So little reason had the author to insinuate, that the one was only *not conformable*, the other *contrary* to experience. If there be a difference in this respect, the first, to one alike unacquainted with both, must appear the more contrary of the two.

Does it alter the matter, that he calls the former "a fact which arose from a state of "nature, with which the Indian was unac-"quainted?" Was not such a state quite unconformable, or (which in the author's language I have shewn to be the same) contrary to his experience? Is then a state of nature which is contrary to experience, more credible than a single fact contrary to experience? I want the solution of one difficulty: the author, in order to satisfy me, presents me with a thousand others. Is this suitable to the method he proposes in another place, of admitting always the less miracle, and rejecting the greater?* Is it not,

* P. 182.

on the contrary, admitting without any difficulty the greater miracle, and thereby removing the difficulty, which he otherwise would have had in admitting the less? Does he forget, that, to exhibit a state of nature entirely different from what we experience at present, is one of those enormous prodigies, which, in his account, render the Pentateuch unworthy of credit? * "No Indian," says he, in the note, "it is evident, "could have experience that water did not "freeze in cold climates. This is placing "nature in a situation quite unknown to "him, and it is impossible for him to tell, *a* "*priori*, what will result from it." This is precisely, as if, in reply to the author's objection from experience against the raising of a dead man (suppose Lazarus) to life, I should retort: "Neither you, Sir, nor any "who live in this century, can have expe"rience, that a dead man could not be re"stored to life at the command of one di"vinely commissioned to give a revelation "to men. This is placing nature in a situa"tion quite unknown to you, and it is im"possible for you to tell, *a priori*, what will "result from it. This, therefore, is not con-

* P. 206.

"trary to the course of nature, in cases "where all the circumstances are the same. "As you never saw one vested with such a "commission, you are as unexperienced, as "ignorant of this point, as the inhabitants "of Sumatra are of the frosts in Muscovy; "you cannot therefore reasonably, any more "than they, be positive as to the conse-"quences." Should he rejoin, as doubtless he would, "this is not taking away the diffi-"culty; but, like the elephant and the tor-"toise, in the account given by some bar-"barians of the manner in which the earth "is supported, it only shifts the difficulty a "step further back. My objection still re-"curs. That any man should be endowed "with such power, is contrary to experience, "and therefore incredible:" Should he, I say, rejoin in this manner, I could only add, "Pray, Sir, revise your own words lately "quoted, and consider impartially whether "they be not as glaringly exposed to the "like reply." For my part, I can only perceive one difference that is material between the two cases. You frankly confess, that with regard to the freezing of water, besides the absolute want of experience, there would be from analogy a presumption against it,

which ought to weigh with a rational Indian. I think, on the contrary, in the case supposed by me, of one commissioned by Heaven, there is at least no presumption against the exertion of such a miraculous power. There is rather a presumption in its favour.

Does the author then say that no testimony could give the king of Siam sufficient evidence of the effects of cold in water? No. By implication he says the contrary: "It requir-"ed very strong testimony." Will he say, that those most astonishing effects of electricity lately discovered, so entirely unanalagous to every thing before experienced, will he say, that such facts no reasonable man could have sufficient evidence from testimony to believe? No. We may presume, he will not, from his decision in the former case; and if he should, the common sense of mankind would reclaim against his extravagance. Yet it is obvious to every considerate reader, that his argument concludes equally against those truly marvellous, as against miraculous events; both being alike unconformable, or alike contrary to former experience.*

* I cannot forbear to observe, that many of the principal terms employed in the essay, are used in a manner extremely vague and unphilosophical. I have remarked

THUS I think I have shewn, that the author is chargeable with some fallacies, in his way of managing the argument; that he all along avails himself of an ambiguity in the word *experience*;——that his reasoning in-

the confusion I find in the application of the words, *experience, contrariety, conformity.* I might remark the same thing of the word, *miracle.* "A miracle," it is said, *p.* 182, *in the note,* "may be accurately defined, "*A* TRANSGRESSION *of a law of nature, by a particular* "*volition of the Deity, or by the interposal of some in-*"*visible agent.*" The word *transgression* invariably denotes a criminal opposition to authority. The author's accuracy in representing God as a transgressor, I have not indeed the perspicacity to decern. Does he intend, by throwing something monstrous into the definition, to infuse into the reader a prejudice against the thing defined? But supposing that, through inadvertency, he had used the term *transgression,* instead of *suspension,* which would have been both intelligible and proper; one would at least expect that the word *miracle* in the essay, always expressed the sense of the definition. But this it evidently does not. Thus in the instance of the miracle supposed *(p.* 203 *in the note),* he calls it, in the beginning of the paragraph, "A violation of the usual "course of nature;" but in the end, after telling us that such a miracle, on the evidence supposed, "our "present philosophers ought to receive for certain," he subjoins (how consistently, let the reader judge) "and ought to search for the causes, whence it might

cludes a *petitio principii* in the bosom of it; ——and that, in supporting his argument, he must have recourse to distinctions, where, even himself being judge, there is no difference.

" be derived." Thus it is insinuated, that though a fact apparently miraculous, and perfectly extraordinary, might be admitted by a philosopher, still the reality of the miracle must be denied. For if the interposal of the Deity be the proper solution of the phenomenon, why should we recur to natural causes? Hence a careless reader is insensibly led to think, that there is some special incredibility in such an interposal, distinct from its *uncommonness*. Yet the author's great argument is built on this single circumstance, and places such an interposition just on the same footing with every event that is equally uncommon. At one time, he uses the word *miracle* to denote *bare improbability*, as will appear in the sixth section: at another, *absurd* and *miraculous* are with him synonymous terms; so are also the *miraculous nature* of an event, and its *absolute impossibility*. Is this the style and manner of a reasoner?

SECT. III.

Mr. Hume himself gives up his favourite argument.

" MR. HUME himself," methinks I hear my reader repeating with astonishment, " gives " up his favourite argument! To prove this " point is indeed a very bold attempt." Yet that this attempt is not altogether so arduous as at first hearing, he will possibly imagine, I hope, if favoured a while with his attention, fully to convince him. If to acknowledge, after all, that there may be miracles which admit of proof from human testimony; if to acknowledge, that such miracles ought to be received, not as probable only, but as absolutely certain; or, in other words, that the proof from human testimony may be such, as that all the contrary uniform experience, should not only be overbalanced, but, to use the author's expression, should be annihilated; if such acknowledgments as these, are subversive of his own principles; if by making them, he abandons his darling argument; this strange part the essayist evidently acts.

" I own," these are his words, " there " may possibly be miracles, or violations of

" the usual course of nature, of such a kind " as to admit a proof from human testi- " mony, though perhaps" (in this he is modest enough, he avers nothing ; *perhaps*) " it " will be impossible to find any such in all the " records of history." To this declaration he subjoins the following supposition : " Sup- " pose all authors, in all languages, agree, " that from the 1st of January 1600, there " was a total darkness over the whole earth " for eight days ; suppose that the tradition " of this extraordinary event is still strong " and lively among the people ; that all tra- " vellers, who return from foreign countries, " bring us accounts of the same tradition, " without the least variation or contradic- " tion ; it is evident, that our present philo- " sophers, instead of doubting of that fact, " ought to receive it for certain, and ought " to search for the causes whence it might be " derived."*

Could one imagine, that the person who had made the above acknowledgment, a person too who is justly allowed by all who are acquainted with his writings, to possess uncommon penetration and philosophical abilities, that this were the same individual who

* P. 203, in the note.

had so short while before affirmed, that "a "miracle," or a violation of the usual course of nature, "supported by any human testi- "mony, is more properly a subject of deri- "sion than of argument;"* who had insisted, that "it is not requisite, in order to "reject the fact, to be able accurately to "disprove the testimony, and to trace its "falsehood; that such an evidence carries "falsehood on the very face of it;"† that "we need but oppose even to a cloud of "witnesses, the absolute impossibility, or," which is all one, "miraculous nature of the "events which they relate; that this in the "eyes of all reasonable people will alone be "regarded as a sufficient refutation;"‡ and who, finally to put an end to all altercation on the subject, hath pronounced this *oracle*. "NO TESTIMONY FOR ANY KIND OF MI- "RACLE CAN EVER POSSIBLY AMOUNT TO "A PROBABILITY, MUCH LESS TO A PROOF."‖ Was there ever a more glaring contradiction?

YET, for the event supposed by the essayist, the testimony, in his judgment, would a-

* P. 194. † Ib. ‡ P. 196, &c. ‖ P. 202.

mount to a *probability;* nay, to more than a probability, to a *proof;* let not the reader be astonished, or if he cannot fail to be astonished, let him not be incredulous, when I add, to *more than a proof*, more than a full, entire, and direct proof; for even this I hope to make evident from the author's principles and reasoning. "And even supposing," says he, that is, granting for argument's sake, "that the testimony for a miracle amounted "to a proof, it would be opposed by ano- "ther proof, derived from the very nature "of the fact, which it would endeavour to "establish."* Here is, then, by his own reasoning, proof against proof, from which there could result no belief or opinion, unless the one is conceived to be in some degree superior to the other. "Of which "proofs," says he, "the strongest must pre- "vail, but still with a diminution of its force, "in proportion to that of its antagonist."† Before the author could believe such a miracle as he supposes, he must at least be satisfied that the proof of it from testimony is stronger than the proof against it from experience. That we may form an accurate judgment of the strength he here ascribes to

* P. c2 P. 180.

testimony, let us consider what, by his own account, is the strength of the opposite proof from experience. "A miracle is a violation "of the laws of nature; and as a firm and "unalterable experience has established these "laws, the proof against a miracle, from the "very nature of the fact, is as *entire*, as any "argument from experience can possibly be "imagined."* Again, "As an uniform "experience amounts to a proof, there is "here a *direct* and *full* proof, from the na- "ture of the fact, against the existence of "any miracle."† The proof then which the essayist admits from testimony, is, by his own estimate, not only superior to a *direct* and *full* proof; but even superior to as *entire* a proof, as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined. Whence, I pray, doth testimony acquire such amazing evidence? "Testimony," says the author, "hath no evidence, but what it derives from "experience. These differ from each other "only as the species from the genus." Put then for *testimony*, the word *experience*, which in this case is equivalent, and the conclusion will run thus: *Here is a proof from experience, which is superior to as entire a proof from*

* P. 189. † P. 181.

experience as can possibly be imagined. This deduction from the author's words, the reader will perceive, is strictly logical. What the meaning of it is, I leave to Mr. Hume to explain.

What hath been above deduced, how much soever it be accounted, is not all that is implied in the concession made by the author. He further says, that the miraculous fact so attested, ought not only to be received, but to be received *for certain.* Is it not enough, Sir, that you have shown that your most full, most direct, most perfect argument may be overcome? will nothing satisfy you now but its destruction? One would imagine, that you had conjured up this demon, by whose irresistible arm you proposed to give a mortal blow to religion, and render scepticism triumphant (that you had conjured him up, I say), for no other purpose, but to shew with what facility you could lay him. To be serious, does not this author remember, that he had oftener than once laid it down as a maxim, that when there is proof against proof, we must incline to the superior, still with a diminution of assurance, in proportion to the force of its antagonist?*

* P. 178, 180.

But when a fact is received *for certain*, there can be no sensible diminution of assurance, such diminution always implying some doubt and *uncertainty*. Consequently the general proof from experience, though as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined, is not only surmounted, but is really in comparison as nothing, or, in Mr. Hume's phrase, undergoes annihilation, when balanced with the particular proof from testimony. Great, indeed, it must be acknowledged, is the force of truth. This conclusion, on the principles I have been endeavouring to establish, has nothing in it, but what is conceivable and just; but on the principles of the essay, which deduce all the force of testimony from experience, serves only to confound the understanding, and to involve the subject in midnight darkness.

It is therefore manifest, that either this author's principles condemn his own method of judging, with regard to miraculous facts; or that his method of judging subverts his principles, and is a tacit desertion of them. Thus, that impregnable fortress, the asylum of infidelity, which he so lately gloried in

having erected, is in a moment abandoned by him, as a place untenable.

SECT. IV.

There is no peculiar presumption against such miracles as are said to have been wrought in support of religion.

Is it then so, that the decisive argument, the essayist flattered himself he had discovered,* which with the wise and learned, was to prove an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusion, and would consequently be useful as long as the world endures? is it so, that this boasted argument hath in fact little or no influence on the discoverer himself? But this author may well be excused. He cannot be always the metaphysician. He cannot soar incessantly in the clouds. Such constant elevation suits not the lot of humanity. He must sometimes, whether he will or not, descend to a level with other people, and fall into the humble track of common sense. One thing, however, he is resolved on: If he cannot by metaphysic spells silence the most arrogant bigotry and superstition; he will at any rate, though for this purpose he

* P. 174.

should borrow aid from what he hath a liking to, trite and popular topics; he will at any rate free himself from their impertinent solicitations.

There are accordingly two principles in human nature, by which he accounts for all the relations, that have ever been in the world, concerning miracles. These principles are, the *passion for the marvellous*, and the *religious affection*;* against either of which singly, the philosopher, he says, ought ever to be on his guard; but incomparably more so, when both happen to be in strict confederacy together. "For if the spirit "of religion join itself to the love of wonder, there is an end of common sense; "and human testimony in these circumstances loses all pretensions to authority."† Notwithstanding this strong affirmation, there is reason to suspect that the author is not in his heart so great an enemy to the love of wonder as he affects to appear. No man can make a greater concession in favour of the wonderful than he hath done in the passage quoted in the preceding section. No man was ever fonder of paradox, and, in theoretical subjects, of

* P. 184, 185. † P. 185.

every notion that is remote from sentiments universally received. This love of paradoxes, he owns himself, that both his enemies and his friends reproach him with.* There must surely be some foundation for so universal a censure. If, therefore, in respect of the passion for the marvellous, he differ from other people, the difference ariseth from a particular delicacy in this gentleman, which makes him nauseate even to wonder with the crowd. He is of that singular turn that where every body is struck with astonishment, he can see nothing wondrous in the least; at the same time he discovers prodigies where no soul but himself ever dreamt that there were any.

We may therefore rest assured of it, that the author might be conciliated to the *love of wonder*, provided the *spirit of religion* be kept at a distance, against which he hath unluckily contracted a mortal antipathy, against which he is resolved to wage eternal war. When he but touches this subject, he loseth at once his philosophic composure, and speaks with an acrimony unusual to him on other occasions. Something of this kind

* Dedication to the four dissertations.

appears from the citations already made. But if these should not satisfy, I shall produce one or two more, which certainly will. There is a second supposition the author makes, of a miraculous event, in a certain manner circumstanced and attested, which he declares, and I think with particular propriety, that HE would "not have the least "*inclination* to believe." * At his want of inclination, the reader will not be surprised, when he learns that this supposed miracle is concerning a *resurrection*; an event which bears too strong a resemblance both to the doctrine and to the miracles of holy writ, not to alarm a modern Pyrrhonist. To the above declaration he subjoins, "But should "this miracle be ascribed to any new system "of religion, men in all ages have been so "much imposed on by *ridiculous stories* of "that kind, that this very circumstance "would be a full proof of a cheat, and sufficient with all men of sense, not only to "make them reject the fact, but even *reject it* "*without further examination.*" Again, a little after, "As the violations of truth are "more common in the testimony concerning religious miracles, than in that con-

* P. 204. in the note.

" cerning any other matter of fact," (a point in which the author is positive, though he neither produceth facts nor arguments to support it) " this must diminish very much the " authority of the former testimony, and" (pray observe his words) " *make us form a* " GENERAL RESOLUTION, *never to lend any* " *attention to it, with whatever specious pre-* " *text it may be covered.*"

Never did the passion of an inflamed orator, or the intemperate zeal of a religionist, carry him further against his adversary than this man of speculation is carried by his prejudice against religion. Demagogues and bigots have often warned the people against listening to the arguments of an envied, and therefore detested, rival, lest by his sophistry they should be seduced into the most fatal errors. The same part this author, a philosopher, a sceptic, a dispassionate inquirer after truth, as surely he chooseth to be accounted, now acts in favour of infidelity. He thinks it not safe to give religion even a hearing. Nay, so strange a turn have matters taken of late with the managers of this controversy, that it is now the FREE-THINKER who preaches *implicit faith;* it is the INFIDEL who warns us of the dan-

ger of consulting *reason*. Beware, says he, I admonish you, of inquiring into the strength of the plea, or of bringing it to the deceitful test of reason; for "those "who will be so SILLY as to examine the "affair by that medium, and seek particu- "lar flaws in the *testimony*, are almost sure "to be confounded."* That religion is concerned in the matter, is reckoned by these sages sufficient evidence of imposture. The proofs she offers in her own defence, we are told by these candid judges, ought to be rejected, and *rejected without examination*. The old way of scrutiny and argument must now be laid aside, having been at length discovered to be but a bungling, a tedious, and a dangerous way at best. What then shall we substitute in its place? The essayist hath a most admirable expedient. A shorter and surer method he recommends to us, the expeditious way of *resolution*. "Form," says he "*a* GENERAL RE- 'SOLUTION, *never to lend any attention to tes-* '*timonies or facts urged by religion, with what-* '*ever specious pretence they may be covered.*"

I had almost congratulated Mr. Hume, and our enlightened age, on this happy in-

* P. 179, in the note.

vention, before I reflected, that though the application might be new, the expedient itself, of resolving to be deaf to argument, was very ancient, having been often with great success employed against atheists and heretics, and warmly recommended by Bellarmine and Scotus, and most others of that bright fraternity the schoolmen: persons, I acknowledge, to whom one could not, perhaps, in any other instance, find a resemblance in my ingenious opponent.

I am afraid, that after such a declaration, I must not presume to consider myself as arguing with the author, who hath in so peremptory a manner resolved to attend to nothing that can be said in opposition to his theory. "What judgment he has," to use his own expression, "he has renounced by principle, "in these sublime and mysterious subjects."* If, however, it should prove the fate of these papers, the forbidding title of them notwithstanding, to be at any time honoured with the perusal of some infidel, not indeed so rivetted in unbelief as the essayist, I would earnestly entreat such reader, in the solemn style of Mr. Hume, "To lay his hand upon "his heart, and after serious consideration

* P. 185.

"declare,"* If any of the patrons of religion had acted this part, and warned people not to try by *argument* the metaphysical subtleties of the adversaries, affirming, that "they "who were MAD enough to examine the affair by that medium, and seek particular "flaws in the *reasoning*, were almost sure to "be confounded; that the only prudent "method was, to form a GENERAL RESOLU-"TION, never to lend any attention to what "was advanced on the opposite side, *how-"ever specious;*" whether this conduct would not have afforded great matter of triumph to those gentlemen the deists; whether it would not have been construed by them, and even justly, into a tacit conviction of the weakness of our cause, which we were afraid of exposing in the light, and bringing to a fair trial. But we scorn to take shelter in obscurity, and meanly to decline the combat; confident as we are, that REASON is our *ally* and our *friend*, and glad to find that the enemy at length so violently suspects her.

As to the first method, by which the author accounts for the fabulous relations of monsters and prodigies, it is freely acknow-

* P. 206.

ledged, that the Creator hath implanted in human nature, as a spur to the improvement of the understanding, a principle of *curiosity*, which makes the mind feel a particular pleasure in every new acquisition of knowledge. It is acknowledged also, that as every principle in our nature is liable to abuse, so this principle will often give the mind a bias to the marvellous, for the more marvellous any thing is, that is, the more unlike to all that hath formerly been known, the more new it is; and this bias, in many instances, may induce belief on insufficient evidence.

But the presumption that hence ariseth against the marvellous is not stronger in the case of miracles (as will appear from an attentive perusal of the second section) than in the case of every fact that is perfectly extraordinary. Yet how easily this obstacle may be overcome by testimony, might be illustrated, if necessary, in almost every branch of science, in physiology, in geography, in history. On the contrary, what an immense impediment would this presumption prove to the progress of philosophy and letters, had it in reality one fiftieth part of the strength, which the author seems to attribute to it. I shall not tire my reader or myself by recur-

that the prejudices of the witnesses must have favoured the miracles, since they were zealous promoters of the doctrine, in support of which those miracles are said to have been performed? To answer thus would be to misunderstand the point. The question is, Was this doctrine the faith of the witnesses, before they saw, or fancied they saw the miracles? If it was, I agree with him. Great, very great allowance must be made for the prejudices of education, for principles, early perhaps, carefully, and deeply rooted in their minds, and for the reigious affection founded in these principles; which allowance must always derogate from the weight of their testimony. But if the faith of the witnesses stood originally in opposition to the doctrine attested by the miracles; if the only account that can be given of their conversion, is the conviction which the miracles produced in them; it must be a preposterous way of arguing, to derive their conviction from a religious zeal, which would at first obstinately withstand, and for some time hinder such conviction. On the contrary, that the evidence arising from miracles performed in proof of a doctrine disbelieved, and consequently hated before, did in fact surmount

that obstacle, and conquer all the opposition arising thence, is a very strong presumption in favour of that evidence: just as strong a presumption in its favour, as it would have been against it, had all their former zeal, and principles, and prejudices, co-operated with the evidence, whatever it was, in gaining an entire assent.

Hence there is the greatest disparity in this respect, a disparity which deserves to be particularly attended to, betwixt the evidence of miracles performed in proof of a religion *to be* established, and in *contradiction* to opinions generally received; and the evidence of miracles performed in support of a religion *already* established, and in *confirmation* of opinions generally received. Hence also the greatest disparity betwixt the miracles recorded by the Evangelists, and those related by Mariana, Bede, or any monkish historian.

THERE is then no peculiar presumption against religious miracles merely as such; if in certain circumstances there is a presumption against them, the presumption ariseth solely from the circumstances, insomuch that,

in the opposite circumstances, it is as strongly in their favour.

SECT. V.

There is a peculiar presumption in favour of such miracles as are said to have been wrought in support of religion.

In this section I propose to consider the reverse of the question treated in the former. In the former I proved that there is no peculiar presumption against religious miracles; I now inquire whether there be any in their favour. The question is important, and intimately connected with the subject.

The boldest infidel will not deny, that the immortality of the soul, a future and eternal state, and the connection of our happiness or misery in that state, with our present good or bad conduct, not to mention the doctrines concerning the divine unity and perfections, are tenets which carry no absurdity in them. They may be true for aught he knows. He disbelieves them, not because they are incredible in themselves, but because he hath not evidence of their truth. He pretends not to disprove them, nor does he think the task incumbent on him. He only pleads, that

before he can yield them his assent, they must be proved.

Now, as whatever is possible, may be supposed, let us suppose that the dogmas above mentioned are all infallible truths; and let the unbeliever say, whether he can conceive an object worthier of the divine interposal, than to reveal these truths to mankind; and to enforce them in such a manner as may give them a suitable influence on the heart and life. Of all the inhabitants of the earth, man is incomparably the noblest.—Whatever, therefore, regards the interest of the human species, is a grander concern than what regards either the inanimate or the brute creation. If man was made, as is doubtless not impossible, for an after state of immortality, whatever relates to that immortal state, or may conduce to prepare him for the fruition of it, must be immensely superior to that which concerns merely the transient enjoyments of the present life. How sublime, then, is the object which religion, and religion only, exhibits as the ground of supernatural interpositions! This object is no other than the interest of man, a reasonable and moral agent, the only being in this lower world which bears in his soul the image of his Maker; not the

interest of an individual, but of the kind; not for a limited duration, but for eternity: an object, at least in one respect, adequate to the majesty of God.

Does this appear to the essayist too much like arguing *a priori*, of which I know he hath a detestation? It is just such an argument, as, presupposing the most rational principles of Deism, results from those maxims concerning intelligent causes, and their operations, which are founded in general experience, and which uniformly lead us to expect, that the end will be proportionate to the means. The *Pagans* of Rome had notions of their divinities infinitely inferior to the opinions concerning God, which in Christian countries are maintained even by those, who, for distinction's sake, are called DEISTS. Yet such of the former as had any justness of taste, were offended with those poets, who exhibited the celestials on slight occasions, and for trivial purposes, interfering in the affairs of men. Why? Because such an exhibition shocked all the principles of probability. It had not that verisimilitude which is absolutely necessary to render fiction agreeable. Accordingly it is a precept, with relation to the machinery of the drama, given by one who was both a critic and a poet, *That*

*a god must never be introduced, unless to accomplish some important design, which could not be otherwise effectuated.** The foundation of this rule, which is that of my argument, is therefore one of those indisputable principles, which are found everywhere, among the earliest results of experience.

Thus it appears, that from the dignity of the end, there ariseth a peculiar presumption in favour of such miracles as are said to have been wrought in support of religion.

SECT. VI.

Inquiry into the meaning and propriety of one of Mr. Hume's favourite maxims.

THERE is a method truly curious, suggested by the author, for extricating the mind, should the evidence from testimony be so great, that its falsehood might, as he terms it, be accounted miraculous. In this puzzling case, when a man is so beset with miracles, that he is under a necessity of admitting one, he must always take care it be the smallest; for it is an *axiom* in this writer's DIALECTIC, that *the probability of the fact is in the inverse ratio*

* Nec deus intersit, nisi dignus vindice nodus
Inciderit. HORAT.

the quantity of miracle there is in it. "I weigh," says he, "the one miracle against the other, and according to the superiority which I discover, I pronounce my decision, and always reject the greater miracle."*

Now, of this method, which will no doubt thought by many to be very ingenious, and ich appears to the essayist both very monstous and very perspicuous, I own I am able to discover either the reasonableness the use.

First, I cannot see the reasonableness. "A miracle," to adopt his own definition, implies the transgression," or rather the suspension, "of some law of nature; and that either by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposal of some invisible agent."† Now, as I should think, from principles laid down in the preceding sec- n, that it would be for no trifling purpose, t the laws of nature would be suspended, l either the Deity or an invisible agent uld interpose; it is on the same principles, ural to imagine, that the means, or miracle formed, should bear a proportion, in re- ct of dignity and greatness, to the end pro-

* P. 182. † Ib. in the note.

posed. Were I therefore under such a necessity, as is supposed by Mr. Hume, of admitting the truth of a miracle, I acknowledge, that of two contradictory miracles, where all other circumstances are equal, I should think it reasonable to believe the greater. I shall borrow an illustration from the author himself. "A miracle," he says, "may either be *discoverable* by men or not. This alters not its nature and essence. The raising of a house or ship into the air is a visible miracle; the raising of a feather, when the wind wants *ever so little* of a force requisite for that purpose, is as real a miracle, though not so *sensible* with regard to us."* Surely if any miracle may be called *little*, the last mentioned is entitled to that denomination, not only because it is an *undiscoverable* and *insensible* miracle, but because the quantum of miraculous force requisite, is, by the hypothesis, *ever so little*, or the least conceivable. Yet, if it were certain, that God, angel, or spirit, were, for one of those purposes, to interpose in suspending the laws of nature, I believe most men would join with me in thinking, that it would be rather for the raising of a *house* or *ship*, than for the raising of a *feather*.

* P 182, in the note.

But though the maxim laid down by the author were just, I cannot discover in what instance, or by what application, it can be rendered of any utility. Why? Because we have no rule whereby we can judge of the greatness of miracles. I allow, that in such a singular instance, as that above quoted from the essay, we may judge safely enough. But that can be of no practical use. In almost every case that will occur, I may warrantably aver, that it will be impossible for the acutest intellect to decide, which of two is the greater miracle. As to the author, I cannot find that he has favoured us with any light, in so important and so critical a question. Have we not then some reason to dread, that the task will not be less difficult to furnish us with a *measure*, by which we can determine the magnitude of miracles; than to provide us with a *balance*, by which we can ascertain the comparative weight of testimonies and experiences?

If, leaving the speculations of the essayist, we shall, in order to be assisted on this subject, recur to his example and decisions; let us consider the miracle which was recited in the third section, and which he declares, would, on the evidence of such testimony as he supposes, not only be probable but certain. For

my part, it is not in my power to conceive a greater miracle than that is. The whole universe is affected by it; the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars. The most invariable laws of nature with which we are acquainted, even those which regulate the motions of the heavenly bodies, and dispense darkness and light to worlds, are violated. I appeal to the author himself, whether it could be called a greater, or even so great a miracle, that all the writers at that time, or even all mankind, had been seized with a new species of epidemical delirium, which had given rise to this strange illusion. But in this the author is remarkably unfortunate, that the principles by which he in fact regulates his judgment and belief, are often the reverse of those which he endeavours to establish in his theory.

SHALL I hazard a conjecture? It is, that the word *miracle*, as thus used by the author, is used in a vague and improper sense, as a synonymous term for *improbable*; and that believing the *less*, and rejecting the *greater miracle*, denotes simply believing what is *least*, and rejecting what is *most improbable*; or still more explicitly, believing what we think *most worthy of belief*, and rejecting what we think

least worthy. I am aware, on a second perusal of the author's words, that my talent in guessing may be justly questioned. He hath in effect told us himself what he means. "When any one," says he, "tells me, that "he saw a dead man restored to life, I im- "mediately consider with myself, whether it "be more *probable*, that this person should "either deceive or be deceived, or that the "fact he relates should really have happened. "I weigh the one miracle against the other; "and according to the superiority which I "discover, I pronounce my decision, and al- "ways reject the greater miracle. If the false- "hood of his testimony would be more mi- "raculous than the event which he relates; "then, and not till then, can he pretend to "command my belief or opinion."* At first, indeed, one is ready to exclaim, What a strange *revolution* is here! The belief of miracles, then, even by Mr. Hume's account, is absolutely inevitable. Miracles themselves, too, so far from being impossible, or even extraordinary, are the commonest things in nature; so common, that when any miraculous fact is attested to us, we are equally under a necessity of believing a miracle, whether we

* P. 182.

believe the fact, or deny it. The whole difference between the essayist and us, is at length reduced to this single point, whether greater or smaller miracles are entitled to the preference, This mystery, however, vanishes on a nearer inspection. The style, we find, is figurative, and the author is all the while amusing both his readers and himself with an unusual application of a familiar term. What is called the weighing of *probabilities* in one sentence, is the weighing of *miracles* in the next. If it were asked, for what reason did not Mr Hume express his sentiment in ordinary and proper words? I could only answer, I know no reason but one, and that is, to give the appearance of novelty and depth to one of those very harmless propositions, which by philosophers are called *identical*, and which, to say the truth, need some disguise to make them pass upon the world with tolerable decency.

What then shall be said of the conclusion which he gives as the sum and quintessence of the first part of the essay? The best thing, for aught I know, that can be said, is, that it contains a most certain truth, though at the same time the least significant, that ever perhaps was ushered into the world with so much so-

lemnity. In order, therefore, to make *plainer English* of his *plain consequence*, let us only change the word *miraculous*, as applied to the falsehood of human testimony, into *improbable*, which in this passage is entirely equivalent, and observe the effect produced by this elucidation. "The plain consequence is, and it is "a GENERAL MAXIM, *worthy of our at-* "*tention*, THAT NO TESTIMONY IS SUFFICI- "ENT TO ESTABLISH A MIRACLE, UNLESS "THE TESTIMONY BE OF SUCH A KIND, THAT "ITS FALSEHOOD WOULD BE MORE IMPRO- "BABLE THAN THE FACT WHICH IT EN- "DEAVOURS TO ESTABLISH."* If the reader thinks himself instructed by this discovery, I should be loth to envy him the pleasure he may derive from it.

* P. 182.

A DISSERTATION ON MIRACLES.

PART II.

THE MIRACLES ON WHICH THE BELIEF OF CHRISTIANITY IS FOUNDED, ARE SUFFICIENTLY ATTESTED.

SECT. I.

There is no presumption arising from human nature, against the miracles said to have been wrought in proof of Christianity.

FROM what hath been evinced in the fourth and fifth sections of the former part, with regard to religion in general, *two corollaries* are clearly deducible in favour of Christianity. *One* is, That the presumption arising from the dignity of the end, to say the least of it, can in no religion be pleaded with greater advantage than in the Christian. *The other* is, that the presumption arising from the religious affection, instead of weakening, corroborates

the evidence of the gospel. The faith of Jesus was promulgated, and gained ground, not with the assistance, but in defiance of all the religious zeal and prejudices of the times.

In order to invalidate the *second* corollary, it will possibly be urged, that prosyletes to a new religion may be gained at first; either by address and eloquence, or by the appearances of uncommon sanctity, and rapturous fervours of devotion; that if once people have commenced prosyletes, the transition to enthusiasm is almost unavoidable? and that enthusiasm will fully account for the utmost pitch both of credulity and falseness.

Admitting that a few converts might be made by the aforesaid arts, it is subversive of all the laws of probability, to imagine, that the strongest prepossessions, fortified with that vehement abhorrence which contradiction in religious principles rarely fails to excite, should be so easily vanquished in multitudes. Besides, the very pretext of supporting the doctrine by miracles, if a false pretext, would of necessity do unspeakable hurt to the cause. The pretence of miracles will quickly attract the attention of all to whom the new doctrine is published. The influence which ad-

dress and eloquence, appearances of sanctity and fervours of devotion, would otherwise have had, however great, will be superseded by the consideration of what is infinitely more striking and decisive. The miracles will therefore first be canvassed, and canvassed with a temper of mind the most unfavourable to conviction. It is not solely on the testimony of the evangelists that Christians believe the gospel, though that testimony appears in all respects such as merits the highest regard; but it is on the success of the gospel; it is on the testimony, as we may justly call it, of the numberless proselytes that were daily made to a religion, opposing all the religious professions then in the world, and appealing, for the satisfaction of every body, to the visible and miraculous interposition of Heaven in its favour. The witnesses considered in this light, and in this light they ought to be considered, will be found more than "a sufficient number;" and though perhaps there were few of them, what the author would denominate "men of "education and learning;" yet, which is more essential, they were generally men of good sense, and knowledge enough to secure them against all delusion, as to those plain

for which they gave their testimony; who (in the common acceptation of the) neither did, nor could derive to themeither interest or honour by their atons, but did thereby, on the contrary, itly abandon all hopes of both.

deserves also to be remembered, that is here no contradictory testimony, notanding that both the Founder of our on and his adherents were from the first unded by inveterate enemies, who never eemed the matter too inconsiderable to serve their attention or regard;" and as they could not want the means, gave nt proofs that they wanted not the inion, to detect the fraud, if there had any fraud to be detected. They were is of their own reputation and authoriand foresaw but too clearly, that the ss of Jesus would give a fatal blow to

As to the testimonies themselves, we permit the author to try them by his rules.* There is here no opposition of nony; there is no apparent ground of cion from the character of the witnesses; is no interest which they could have in sing on the world; there is not a small

* P. 178.

number of witnesses, they are innumerable. Do the historians of our Lord deliver their testimony with doubt and hesitation? Do they fall into the opposite extreme of using too violent asseverations? So far from both, that the most amazing instances of divine power, and the most interesting events, are related without any censure or reflection of the writers on persons, parties, actions, or opinions; with such an unparalleled and unaffected simplicity, as demonstrates, that they were neither themselves animated by passion like enthusiasts, nor had any design of working on the passions of their readers. The greatest miracles are recorded, with as little appearance either of doubt or wonder in the writer, and with as little suspicion of the reader's incredulity, as the most ordinary incidents: a manner as unlike that of impostors as of enthusiasts; a manner in which those writers are altogether singular; and I will add, a manner which can on no supposition be tolerably accounted for, but that of the truth, and not of the truth only, but of the notoriety, of the events which they related. They spoke like people, who had themselves been long familiarized to such acts of omnipotence and grace. They spoke like

eople, who knew, that many of the most marvellous actions they related, had been so ublicly performed, and in the presence of ultitudes alive at the time of their writing, as o be uncontrovertible, and as in fact not to ave been controverted, even by their bitterest oes. They could boldly appeal on this head o their enemies. *A man*, say they, speaking of their Master,* *approved of God among ou, by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as* YE OURSELVES ALSO KNOW. The objections of Christ's persecutors against his doctrine, those objections also which regard the nature of his miracles, are, together with his answers, faithfully recorded by the sacred historians; it is strange, if the occasion had been given, that we have not the remotest hint of any objections against the reality of his miracles, and a confutation of those objections.

BUT passing the manner in which the first proselytes may be gained to a new religion, and supposing some actually gained, no matter how, to the faith of Jesus; can it be easily accounted for, that, even with the help of those early converts, this religion

* Acts ii, 22.

should have been propagated in the world, on the *false* pretence of miracles? Nothing more easily, says the author. Those original propagators of the gospel have been deceived themselves; for, "a religionist may be an "*enthusiast*, and imagine he sees what has "no reality."*

Were this admitted, it would not, in the present case, remove the difficulty. He must not only himself imagine he sees what has no reality; he must make every body present, those who are no enthusiasts, nor even friends, nay, he must make enemies also, imagine they see the same thing which he imagines he sees; for the miracles of Jesus were acknowledged by those who persecuted him.

That an *enthusiast* is very liable to be imposed on, in whatever favours the particular species of enthusiasm, with which he is affected, none who knows any thing of the human heart will deny. But still this frailty hath its limits. For my own part, I cannot find examples of any, even among enthusiasts (unless to the conviction of every body they were distracted), who did not see and hear in the same manner as other people. Many of this tribe have mistaken the reveries of a heat-

* P. 185.

ed imagination, for the communications of the Divine Spirit, who never, in one single instance, mistook the operations of their external senses. Without marking this difference, we should make no distinction between the *enthusiastic* character and the *frantic*, which are in themselves evidently distinct. How shall we then account from *enthusiasm*, for the testimony given by the apostles, concerning the resurrection of their Master, and his ascension into heaven, not to mention innumerable other facts? In these it was impossible that any, who in the use of their reason were but one remove from *Bedlamites*, should have been deceived. Yet, in the present case, the unbeliever must even say more than this, and, accumulating absurdity upon absurdity, must affirm, that the apostles were deceived as to the resurrection and ascension of their master, notwithstanding that they they themselves had concerted the plan of stealing his body, and concealing it.

But this is not the only resource of the infidel. If he is driven from this strong hold, he can take refuge in another. Admit the apostles were not deceived themselves, they may nevertheless have been, through mere

devotion and benevolence, incited to deceive the rest of mankind. The religionist, rejoins the author, " may know his narration to be " false, and yet persevere in it, with the best " intentions in the world, for the sake of pro- " moting so holy a cause."*

Our religion, to use its own nervous language, teacheth us,† that we ought not to lie, or *speak wickedly*, not even *for God;* that we ought not to *accept his person* in judgment, or *talk*, or act, *deceitfully for him*. But so very little, it must be owned, has this sentiment been attended to, even in the Christian world, that one would almost think it contained a strain of virtue too sublime for the apprehension of the multitude. It is therefore a fact not to be questioned, that little pious frauds, as they are absurdly, not to say impiously, called, have been often practised by ignorant zealots, in support of a cause, which they firmly believed to be both true and holy. But in all such cases the truth and holiness of the cause are wholly independent of those artifices. A person may be persuaded of the former, who is too clear-sighted to be deceived by the latter: for even a full conviction of the truth of the cause is not, in the least, in-

* P. 185. † Job xiii. 7, 8.

nsistent with either the consciousness, or e detection of the frauds used in support it. In the Romish church, for example, ere are many zealous and orthodox be-vers, who are nevertheless incapable of be g imposed on by the lying wonders, which me of their clergy have exhibited. The cumstances of the apostles were widely dif-rent from the circumstances either of those lievers or of their clergy. Some of the iraculous events which the apostles attest-l, were not only the *evidences*, but the dis-nguishing *doctrines* of the religion which ey taught. There is, therefore, in their se, an absolute inconsistency betwixt a nviction of the truth of the cause, and the nsciousness of the frauds used in support f it. Those frauds themselves, if I may so xpress myself, constituted the very essence f the cause. What were the tenets, by hich they were distinguished, in their re-gious system, particularly from the Phari-ees, who owned not only the unity and per-ections of the Godhead, the existence of an-els and demons, but the general resurrec-ion, and a future state of rewards and pu-ishments? Were not these their peculiar enets, That " Jesus, whom the Jews and

" Romans joined in crucifying without the " gates of Jerusalem, had suffered that ig- " nominious death, to make atonement for " the sins of men? * that, in testimony of " this, and of the divine acceptance, God " had raised him from the dead? that he " had exalted him to his own right hand, " to be a prince and a saviour, to give re- " pentance to the people, and the remission " of their sins? † that he is now our advo- " cate with the Father? ‡ that he will de- " scend from heaven at the last day, to " judge the world in righteousness, § and to " receive his faithful disciples into heaven, " to be for ever with himself?" ‖ These fundamental articles of their system, they must have known, deserved no better appellation than a string of lies, if we suppose them liars in the testimony they gave of the resurrection and ascension of their master. If, agreeably to the Jewish hypothesis, they had, in a most wonderful and daring manner, stole by night the corpse from the sepulchre, that, on the false report of his resurrection, they might found the stupendous fabric they

* Rom. v, 6, &c.
† Acts ii, 32, &c. v, 30, &c. x, 40, &c.
‡ 1 Jo. ii, 1.
§ Acts x, 42. xvii, 31. ‖ Jo. xiv, 3.

d projected among themselves, how was possible they should conceive the cause to either true or holy? They must have own, that in those cardinal points, on ich all depends, they were false witnesses ıcerning God, wilful corrupters of the re-ion of their country, and public, though leed disinterested incendiaries, whitherso-:r they went. They could not therefore oy even that poor solace, "that the end will sanctify the means;" a solace with ich the monk or anchoret silences the nonstrances of his conscience, when, in fence of a religion which he regards as tain, he, by some pitiful juggler-trick, poseth on the credulity of the rabble. ı the contrary, the whole scheme of the ɔstles must have been, and not only must ve been, but must have appeared to them-ves, a most audacious freedom with their ıker, a villanous imposition on the world, d I will add, a most foolish and ridiculous ɔject of heaping ruin and disgrace upon :mselves, without the prospect of any com-nsation in the present life, or reversion in ɜ future.

ONCE more, can we account for so extra-

ordinary a phenomenon, by attributing it to that most powerful of all motives, as the author thinks it,* "an ambition to attain "so sublime a character, as that of a mis- "sionary, a prophet, an ambassador from "heaven?"

Not to mention, that such a towering ambition was but ill adapted to the mean rank, poor education, and habitual circumstances, of such men as the apostles mostly had been; a desire of that kind, whatever wonders it may effectuate, when supported by enthusiasm, and faith, and zeal, must have soon been crushed by the outward, and, to human appearance, insurmountable difficulties and distresses they had to encounter; when quite unsupported from within, by either faith or hope, or the testimony of a good conscience; rather, I should have said, when they themselves were haunted from within by a consciousness of the blackest guilt, impiety, and baseness. Strange, indeed, it must be owned, without a parallel, that, in such a cause, and in such circumstances, not only one, but all, should have the resolution to persevere to the last, in spite of infamy and torture; and that no one among so many confederates,

* P. 200.

should be induced to betray the dreadful secret.

Thus it appears, that no *address* in the FOUNDER of our religion, that no *enthusiastic credulity*, no *pious frauds*, no *ambitious views*, in the FIRST CONVERTS, will account for its propagation on the plea of miracles, if false; and that consequently there is no presumption arising from *human nature* against the miracles said to have been wrought in proof of Christianity.

SECT. II.

There is no presumption arising from the history of mankind, against the miracles said to have been wrought in proof of Christianity.

IN the foregoing section, I reasoned only from the knowledge that experience affords us of *human nature*, and of the motives by which men are influenced in their conduct, I come now to the examination of facts, that I may know whether the *history of mankind* will invalidate or corroborate my reasoni: gs.

THE essayist is confident, that all the evi-

dence resulting hence is on his side. Nay, so unquestionable a truth doth this appear to him, that he never attempts to prove it: he always presupposeth it, as a point universally acknowledged. "Men in all ages," we learn from a passage already quoted, "have been much imposed on, by ridi-"culous stories of miracles ascribed to new "systems of religion."* Again he asserts, that "the violations of truth are more com-"mon in the testimony concerning reli-"gious miracles, than in that concerning "any other matter of fact."† These assertions, however, though used for the same purpose, the attentive reader will observe, are far from conveying the same sense, or being of equal weight in the argument. The difference hath been marked in the fourth section of the first part of this tract. The oracular predictions among the ancient Pagans, and the pretended wonders performed by capuchins and friars, by itinerant or stationary teachers among the Roman Catholics, the author will doubtless reckon among religious miracles; but he can with no propriety denominate them, miracles ascribed

* P. 204, in the note. † P. 205, in the note.

to a new system of religion.* Now it is with those of the class last mentioned, and with those only, that I am concerned; for

* Should the author insist, that such miracles are nevertheless meant to establish, if not a new system, at least some *new point* of religion; that those which are wrought in Spain, for example, are not intended as proofs of the gospel, but as proofs of the efficacy of a particular *crucifix*, or *relic*; which is always a new point, or at least not universally received: I must beg the reader will consider, what is the meaning of this expression, *a new point of religion*. It is not *a new system*, it is not even *a new doctrine*. We know, that one article of faith in the church of Rome is, that the images and relics of saints ought to be worshipped. We know also, that in proof of this article, it is one of their principal arguments, that miracles are wrought by means of such relics and images. We know further, that that church never attempted to enumerate her relics and other trumpery, and thus to ascertain the individual objects of the adoration of her votaries. The producing therefore a *new relic*, *image*, or *crucifix*, as an object of worship, implies not the smallest *deviation* from the *faith established*; at the same time the opinion, that *miracles* are performed by means of such relic, image, or crucifix, proves, in the minds of the people, for the reason assigned, a very strong *confirmation* of the *faith established*. All such miracles, therefore, must be considered as wrought in support of the received superstition, and accordingly are always favoured by the popular prejudices.

57418

it is only to them that the miracles wrought in proof of Christianity bear any analogy.

I shall then examine impartially this bold assertion, that "men in all ages have been "much imposed on, by ridiculous stories of "miracles ascribed to new systems of reli-"gion." For my part, I am fully satisfied, that there is not the shadow of truth in it; and I am utterly at a loss to conceive what could induce an author, so well versed in the annals both of modern and ancient times as Mr. Hume, in such a positive manner to advance it. I believe it will require no elaborate disquisition to evince, that these two, JUDAISM and CHRISTIANITY, are of all that have subsisted, or now subsist in the world, the only religions, which claim to have been attended in their first publication with the evidence of *miracles*. It deserves also to be remarked, that it is more in conformity to common language, and incidental distinctions which have arisen, than to strict propriety, that I call Judaism and Christianity, two religions. It is true, the Jewish creed, in the days of our Saviour, having been corrupted by rabbinical traditions, stood in many respects, and at this day stands, in direct opposition to the gospel. But it is

ot in this acceptation that I use the word udaism. Such a creed, I am sensible, we can o more denominate the doctrine of the *Old Testament*, than we can denominate the creed f Pope Pius the doctrine of the *New*. And ruly the fate which both institutions, that f *Moses* and that of *Christ*, have met with mong men, hath been in many respects xtremely similar. But when, on the conrary, we consider the religion of the Jews, ot as the system of faith and practice, which resently obtains, or heretofore hath obtaind among that people; but solely as the reigion that is revealed in *the law and the rophets*, we must acknowledge, that in this nstitution are contained the rudiments of he gospel. The same great plan carried n by the Divine Providence, for the reovery and final happiness of mankind, is he subject of both dispensations. They are y consequence closely connected. In the ormer we are acquainted with the *occasion* nd *rise*, in the latter more fully with the *rogress* and *completion* of this benign scheme. t is for for this reason that the scriptures f the *Old Testament*, which alone contain he authentic religion of the SYNAGOGUE, ave ever been acknowledged in the CHURCH,

an essential part of the *gospel-revelation.* The apostles and evangelists, in every part of their writings, presuppose the truth of the Mosaic economy, and often found both their doctrine and arguments upon it. It is therefore, I affirm, only in proof of this one series of revelations, that the aid of miracles hath with success been pretended to.

CAN the PAGAN religion, can, I should rather say, any of the numberless religions (for they are totally distinct) known by the common name of *Pagan*, produce any claim of this kind that will merit our attention? If the author knows of any, I wish he had mentioned it; for in all antiquity, as far as my acquaintance with it reacheth, I can recollect no such claim. However, that I may not, on the one hand, appear to pass the matter too slightly, or, on the other, lose myself, as Mr. Hume expresses it, in too wide a field; I shall briefly consider, whether the ancient religions of *Greece* or *Rome* (which of all the species of heathenish superstition are on many accounts the most remarkable) can present a claim of this nature. Will it be said, that that monstrous

heap of fables we find in ancient bards, relating to the genealogy, production, amours, and achievements of the gods, are the miracles on which Greek and Roman Paganism claims to be founded?

If one should talk in this manner, I must remind him, *first*, that these are by no means exhibited as EVIDENCES, but as the THEOLOGY itself; the poets always using the same affirmative style concerning what passed in heaven, in hell, and in the ocean, where men could not be spectators, as concerning what passed upon earth; *secondly*, that all those mythological tales are confessedly recorded many centuries after they are supposed to have happened; no voucher, no testimony, nothing that can deserve the name of evidence having been produced, or even alleged, in proof of them: *thirdly*, that the intention of the writers seems to be solely the amusement, not the conviction of their readers; that accordingly no writer scruples to model the mythology to his particular taste, or rather caprice; but considering this as a province subject to the laws of Parnassus, all agree in arrogating here the immemorial privilege of poets, to say and feign, unquestioned, what they please: and, *fourthly*, that

at least several of their narrations are allegorical, and as plainly intended to convey some physical or moral instruction, as any of the apologues of Æsop. But to have said even thus much in refutation of so absurd a plea, will perhaps, to many readers, appear superfluous.

LEAVING, therefore, the endless absurdities and incoherent fictions of idolators, I shall inquire, in the next place, whether the MAHOMETAN worship (which in its speculative principles appear more rational) pretends to have been built on the evidence of miracles.

Mahomet, the founder of this profession openly and frequently, as all the world knows, disclaimed such evidence. He frankly owned, that he had no commission nor power to work miracles, being sent of God to the people only as a preacher. Not indeed but that there are things mentioned in the revelation he pretended to give them, which if true, would have been miraculous; such are the nocturnal visits of the angel Gabriel (not unlike those secret interviews which Numa, the institutor of the Roman rites, affirmed, that he had with the goddess Ege

ria), his getting from [illegible] t
the uncreated book [illegible]
heaven, and his most [illegible]
But these miracles [illegible]
of his mission. [illegible]
was witness to them. [illegible]
was because his [illegible]
mplicitly believe [illegible]
admitted things [illegible]
claration. [illegible]
but one, which [illegible]
infidels, as the most [illegible]
a miracle, in which [illegible]
regard [illegible]
dence [illegible]
it, [illegible]
ries [illegible]
ever [illegible]
[illegible]
of the [illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]
[

it is, that notwithstanding the many defiances, which the prophet gave his enemies, sometimes to produce ten chapters, sometimes one, that could bear to be compared with an equal portion of the perspicuous book,* they seem not in the least to have been convinced, that there was any thing miraculous in the matter. Nay, this sublime performance, so highly venerated by every Mussulman, they were not afraid to blaspheme as contemptible, calling it, "A confused heap "of dreams," and "the silly fables of ancient "times."†

* Alcoran. The chapter—of the Cow,—of Jonas, —of Hud.

† —Of Cattle,—of the Spoils,—of the Prophets. That the Alcoran bears a very strong resemblance to the Talmud is indeed evident; but I hardly think we can have a more striking instance of the prejudices of modern infidels, than in their comparing this motley composition to the writings of the Old and New Testament. Let the reader but take the trouble to peruse the history of Joseph by Mahomet, which is the subject of a very long chapter, and to compare it with the account of that patriarch given by Moses, and if he doth not perceive at once the immense inferiority of the former, I shall never, for my part, undertake by argument to convince him of it. To me it appears even almost incredible, that the most beautiful and most affecting passages of holy writ, should have been

Passing, therefore, this equivocal miracle, if I may call it so, which I imagine was of

so wretchedly disfigured by a writer whose intention, we are certain, was not to burlesque them. But that every reader may be qualified to form some notion of this miracle of a book, I have subjoined a specimen of it, from the chapter of *the Ant*; where we are informed particularly of the cause of the visit which the queen of Sheba (there called *Saba*) made to Solomon, and of the occasion of her conversion from idolatry. I have not selected this passage on account of any special futility to be found in it, for the like absurdities may be observed in every page of the performance; but I have selected it, because it is short, and because it contains a distinct story which bears some relation to a passage of scripture. I use Mr. Sale's version, which is the latest and the most approved, omitting only, for the sake of brevity, such supplementary expressions, as have been without necessity inserted by the translator. "Solomon was "David's heir; and he said, O men, we have been "taught the speech of birds, and have had all things "bestowed on us; this is manifest excellence. And "his armies were gathered together to Solomon, con-"sisting of genii, and men, and birds; and they "were led in distinct bands, till they came to the "valley of ants. An ant said, O ants, enter ye into "your habitations, lest Solomon and his army tread "you under foot, and perceive it not. And he smil-"ed, laughing at her words, and said, O Lord, ex-"cite me, that I may be thankful for thy favour, "wherewith thou hast favoured me and my parents;

very little use in *making* prosyletes, whatever use it might have had in *confirming* and

" and that I may do that which is right and well-
" pleasing to thee: and introduce me, through thy
" mercy, among thy servants the righteous. And he
" viewed the birds, and said, What is the reason that
" I see not the lapwing? Is she absent? Verily I will
" chastise her with a severe chastisement, or I will put
" her to death; unless she bring me a just excuse.
" And she tarried not long, and said, I have viewed
" that which thou hast not viewed; and I come to
" thee from Saba, with a certain piece of news. I
" found a woman to reign over them, who is provided
" with every thing, and hath a magnificent throne.
" I found her and her people to worship the sun, be-
" sides God: and Satan hath prepared their works for
" them, and hath turned them aside from the way
" (wherefore they are not directed), lest they should
" worship God, who bringeth to light that which is
" hidden in heaven and earth, and knoweth whatever
" they conceal, and whatever they discover. God!
" there is no God but he; the Lord of the magnificent
" throne. He said, we shall see whether thou hast
" spoken the truth, or whether thou art a liar. Go with
" this my letter, and cast it down to them, then turn
" aside from them, and wait for their answer. The queen
" said, O nobles, verily an honourable letter hath been
" delivered to me; it is from Solomon, and this is the
" tenor thereof. *In the name of the most merciful God, rise*
" *not up against me: but come, and surrender yourselves*
" *to me.* She said, O nobles, advise me in my busi-
" ness: I will not resolve on any thing, till ye be

tutoring those already made; it may be worth while to inquire, what were the reasons, that

" witnesses thereof. They answered, we are endued " with strength, and endued with great prowess in " war; but the command appertaineth to thee: see " therefore what thou wilt command. She said, verily " kings, when they enter a city, waste the same, and " abase the most powerful of the inhabitants thereof: " and so will these do. But I will send gifts to them; " and will wait for what those who shall be sent shall " bring back. And when the ambassador came to " Solomon, that prince said, will ye present me with " riches? Verily that which God hath given me is bet- " ter than what he hath given you; but ye glory in " your gifts. Return to your people. We will sure- " ly come to them with forces, which they shall not " be able to withstand; and we will drive them out " humbled; and they shall be contemptible. And " Solomon said, O nobles, which of you will bring me " her throne, before they come and surrender them- " selves to me? A terrible genius answered, I will " bring it thee, before thou arise from thy place. And " one with whom was the knowledge of the scripture, " said, I will bring it to thee in the twinkling of an eye. " And when Solomon saw it placed before him, he " said, this is a favour of my Lord, that he may " make trial of me, whether I will be grateful, or " whether I will be ungrateful: and he who is grate- " ful, is grateful to his own advantage; but if any " shall be ungrateful, verily my Lord is self-sufficient " and munificent. And he said alter her throne, that " she may not know it, to the end we may see whe-

an engine of such amazing influence was never employed by one who assumed a cha-

"ther she be directed, or whether she be of those "who are not directed. And when she was come, it "was said, is thy throne like this? She answered, As "though it were the same. And we have had know-"ledge bestowed on us before this, and have been re-"signed. But that which she worshipped besides God, "had turned her aside, for she was of an unbelieving "people. It was said to her, enter the palace. And "when she saw it, she imagined it to be a great water, "and she discovered her legs. Solomon said, Verily "this is a palace, evenly floored with glass. She "said, O Lord, verily I have dealt unjustly with my "own soul; and I resign myself, together with Solo-"mon, to God, the Lord of all creatures." Thus poverty of sentiment, monstrosity of invention, which always betokens a distempered, not a rich imagination, and in respect of diction, the most turgid verbosity, so apt to be mistaken by persons of a vitiated taste for true sublimity, are the genuine characteristics of the book. They appear almost in every line. The very titles and epithets assigned to God are not exempt from them. The Lord of the daybreak, the Lord of the magnificent throne, the King of the day of judgment, &c. They are pompous and insignificant. If the language of the Alcoran, as the Mahometans pretend, is indeed the language of God, the thoughts are but too evidently the thoughts of men. The reverse of this is the character of the Bible. When God speaks to men, it is reasonable to think that he addresses them in their own language. In the Bible you will see nothing inflated,

racter so eminent, as the *chief of God's apostles*, and the *seal of the prophets*? Was it the want of address to manage an imposition of this nature? None who knows the history of this extraordinary personage, will suspect that he wanted either the genius to contrive, or the resolution and dexterity to execute, any practicable expedient for promoting his grand design; which was no less than that extensive despotism, both religious and political, he at length acquired. Was it that he had too much honesty to concert and carry on so gross an artifice? Those who believe him to have been an impostor in pretending a divine mission, will hardly suspect him of such delicacy in the methods he would take to accomplish his aim. But in fact there is no colour of reason for such a suggestion. There was no prodigy, no miraculous interposition, which he hesitated to give out, however extravagant, when he saw it would contribute to his ends. Prodigies of which they had no other evidence

nothing affected in the style. The words are human, but the sentiments are divine. Accordingly, there is perhaps no book in the world, as hath been often justly observed, which suffers less by a literal translation into any other language.

but his own allegation, he knew his adversaries might *deny*, but could not *disprove*. His scruples therefore, we may well conclude, proceeded not from *probity*, but from *prudence*; and were solely against such miracles, as must be subjected to the scrutiny of other people's senses. Was it that miracle-working had before that time become so stale a device, that, instead of gaining him the admiration of his countrymen, it would have exposed him to their laughter and contempt? The most cursory perusal of the Alcoran, will, to every man of sense, afford an unanswerable confutation of this hypothesis.* Lastly, Was it that he liv-

* It is observable, that Mahomet was very much harassed by the demands and reasonings of his opposers with regard to miracles. They were so far from despising this evidence, that they considered the power of working miracles as a never-failing badge of the prophetical office; and therefore often assured him, by the most solemn oaths and protestations, that they would submit implicitly to his guidance in religion, if he would once gratify them in this particular. This artful man, who doth not seem to have been of the same opinion with the essayist, that it was easy for cunning and impudence to impose, in a manner of this kind, on the credulity of the multitude, even though an ignorant and barbarous multitude, absolutely refused to subject his mission to so hazardous a trial. There is no

ed in an enlightened age, and amongst a civilized and learned people, who were too quick-sighted to be deceived by tricks, which among barbarians might have produced the most astonishing effects? Quite the reverse. He lived in a barbarous age, and amongst an illiterate people, with whom, if with any, he had reason to believe the grossest deceit would have proved successful.

subject he more frequently recurs to in his Alcoran, being greatly interested to remove the doubts, which were raised in the minds of many, by his disclaiming this power; a power which, till then, had ever been looked upon as the prerogative of the prophets. The following are some of the reasons with which he endeavours to satisfy the people on this head. 1st, The *sovereignty* of God, who is not to be called to account for what he gives or withholds. 2d, The *uselessness* of miracles, because every man is foreordained either to believe, or to remain in unbelief; and this decree no miracles could alter. 3d, The *experienced inefficacy* of miracles in former times. 4th, The *mercy* of God, who had denied them this evidence, because the sin of their incredulity, in case he had granted it, would have been so heinous, that he could not have respited or tolerated them any longer. 5th, The *abuse* to which miracles would have been exposed from the infidels, who would have either charged them with imposture, or imputed them to magic. See the chapters—of Cattle, —of Thunder,—of Al Hejir,—of the Night Journey, —of the Spider,—of the Prophets.

What pity was it, that Mahomet had not a counsellor so deeply versed in human nature as the essayist, who could have assured him, that there needed but effrontery and enterprise; that with these auxiliaries he had reason to hope the most impudent pretences would be crowned with success? The too timid prophet would doubtless have remonstrated against this spirited counsel, insisting, that it was one thing to satisfy *friends*, and another thing to silence or convert *enemies;* that it was one thing to impose on men's *intellects*, and another thing to deceive their *senses:* that though an attempt of the laſt kind should succeed with some, yet if the fraud were detected by any, and he might expect that his adversaries would exert themselves in order to detect it, the whole mystery of craft would be divulged, his friends would become suspicious, and the spectators of such pretended miracles would become daily more prying and critical; that the consequences would infallibly prove fatal to the whole design; and that therefore such a cheat was on no account whatever to be risked. To this methinks I hear the other replying, with some earnestness, "Make but the trial, and you "will certainly find, that what judgment,

" nay, and what senses your auditors have, " they will renounce by principle all those " sublime and mysterious subjects, they will " imagine they see and hear what has no " reality, nay, whatever you shall desire that " they should see and hear. Their credulity " (forgive a freedom which my zeal inspires) " will increase your impudence, and your " impudence will overpower their credulity. " The smallest spark may here kindle into " the greatest flame; because the materials " are always prepared for it. The *vulgum* " *genus auriculiarum* swallow greedily, with- " out examination, whatever soothes super- " stition and promotes wonder." Whether the judicious reader will reckon that the prophet or his counsellor would have had the better in this debate, I shall not take upon me to decide. One perhaps (if I might be indulged in a conjecture) whose notions are founded in metaphysical refinements, or whose resolutions are influenced by oratorical declamation, will incline to the opinion of the latter. One whose sentiments are the result of a practical knowledge of mankind, will probably subscribe to the judgment of the former, and will allow, that in this instance

the CAPTAIN-GENERAL and PROPHET of *Islamism* acted the more prudent part.

Shall we then say, that it was a more *obscure* theatre on which JESUS CHRIST apppeared? Were his spectators *more ignorant*, or *less adverse?* The contrary of both is manifest. It may indeed be affirmed with truth, that the religion of the wild Arabs was more repugnant to the doctrine of Mahomet, than the religious dogmas of the Jews were to those of Jesus. But we shall err egregiously, if we conclude thence, that to this repugnancy the repugnancy of disposition in the professors of these religions must be proportionate. It is a fine observation of the most piercing and comprehensive genius, which hath appeared in this age, That "though men have a very "strong tendency to idolatry, they are never- "theless but little attached to idolatrous re- "ligions; that though they have no great "tendency to spiritual ideas, they are never- "theless strongly attached to religions which "enjoin the adoration of a spiritual being." * Hence an attachment in JEWS, CHRISTIANS, and MAHOMETANS, to their respective religions, which was never displayed by POLYTHEISTS of any denomination. But its *spi-*

* De l'Esprit des Loix, liv. 25, chap. 2.

uality was not the only cause of adherence hich the Jews had to their religion. Every ysical, every moral motive concurred in at people to rivet their attachment, and ake them oppose with violence, whatever re the face of innovation. Their religion d polity were so blended as scarce to be stinguishable: this engaged their *patriotism.* hey were selected of God preferably to other tions; this inflamed their *pride.* * They ere all under one spiritual head, the high-iest, and had their solemn festivals celebrat-l in one temple: this strengthened their *nion.* The ceremonies of their public worship ere magnificent: this flattered their *senses.* hese ceremonies also were numerous, and ccupied a great part of their time: this, to ll the other grounds of attachment, super-dded the force of *habit.* On the contrary, he *simplicity* of the gospel, as well as the spi-it of *humility*, and *moderation*, and *charity*, nd *universality* (if I may be allowed that erm), which it breathed, could not fail to larm a people of such a cast, and awaken, as n fact it did, the most furious opposition. Accordingly, Christianity had fifty times more

* How great influence this motive had, appears from Luke iv, 25, &c. and from Acts xxii, 21, 22.

success amongst idolaters, than it had among the Jews. I am therefore warranted to assert, that if the miracles of our Lord and his apostles had been an imposture, there could not, on the face of the earth, have been chosen for exhibiting them, a more unfavourable theatre than *Judea*. On the other hand, had it been anywhere practicable, by a display of false wonders, to make converts to a new religion, nowhere could a project of this nature have been conducted with greater probability of success than in *Arabia*. So much for the contrast there is betwixt the *Christian* MESSIAH and the ORPHAN CHARGE of *Abu Taleb*. So plain it is, that the *mosque* yields entirely the plea of miracles to the *synagogue* and the *church*.

BUT from HEATHENS and MAHOMETANS, let us turn our eyes to the CHRISTIAN world. The only object here, which merits our attention, as coming under the denomination of miracles ascribed to a new system, and as what may be thought to rival in credibility the miracles of the gospel, are those said to have been performed in the *primitive church*, after the times of the apostles, and after the finishing of the sacred canon. These will

bably be ascribed to a new system, since ristianity, for some centuries, was not, as phrase is) *established*, or (to speak more perly) *corrupted* by human authority: and e even after such establishment, there re- ned long in the empire a considerable ture of idolaters. We have the greater son here to consider this topic, as it hath ately been the subject of very warm dispute, as the cause of Christianity itself (which onceive is totally distinct) seems to have n strangely confounded with it. From the nner in which the argument hath been ducted, who is there that would not con- de, that both must stand or fall together? thing however can be more groundless, hing more injurious to the religion of Jesus, n such a conclusion.

The learned writer who hath given rise to s controversy, not only acknowledges, that : falsity of the miracles mentioned by the thers, is no evidence of the falsity of the racles recorded in Scripture, but that there even a presumption in favour of these, aris- ; from those forgeries, which he pretends have detected. * The justness of the re-

* Dr. Middleton's Prefatory Discourse to his Letter n Rome.

mark contained in this acknowledgment, will appear more clearly from the following observations.

Let it be observed, first, that, supposing numbers of people are ascertained of the truth of some miracles, whether their conviction arise from sense or from testimony, it will surely be admitted as a consequence, that in all such persons, the presumption against miracles from uncommonness must be greatly diminished, in several perhaps totally extinguished.

Let it be observed, secondly, that if true miracles have been employed successfully in support of certain religious tenets, this success will naturally suggest to those, who are zealous of propagating favourite opinions in religion, to recur to the plea of miracles, as the most effectual expedient for accomplishing their end. This they will be encouraged to do on a double account: *first*, they know, that people, from recent experience, are made to expect such a confirmation; *secondly*, they know, that in consequence of this experience, the incredibility, which is the principal obstruction to such an undertaking, is in a manner removed; and there is, on the contrary, as in such circumstances

there certainly would be a promtpness in the generality to receive them.

Add to these, that if we consult the history of mankind, or even our own experience, we shall be convinced, that hardly hath one wonderful event actually happened in any country, even where there hath not been such visible temptations to forgery, which hath not given rise to false rumours of other events similar, but still more wonderful. Hardly hath any person or people achieved some exploits truly extraordinary, to whom common report hath not quickly attributed many others, as extraordinary at least, if not impossible. As *fame* may, in this respect, be compared to a *multiplying glass*, reasonable people almost always conclude in the same way concerning both; we know that there is not a real object corresponding to every appearance exhibited, at the same time we know that there must be some objects to give rise to the appearances.

I should therefore only beg of our adversaries, that, for argument's sake, they will suppose that the miracles related in the New Testament were really performed; and then, that they will candidly tell us what,

according to their notions of human nature, would, in all likelihood, have been the consequences. They must be very partial to a darling hypothesis, or little acquainted with the world, who will hesitate to own, that, on this supposition, it is not barely probable, but certain, that for a few endowed with the miraculous power, there would soon have arisen numbers of pretenders; that from some miracles well attested, occasion would have been taken to propagate innumerable false reports. If so, with what colour of justice can the detection of many spurious reports among the primitive Christians be considered as a presumption against those miracles, the reality of which is the most plausible, nay, the only plausible account that can be given of the origin of such reports? The presumption is too evidently on the opposite side to need illustration.

It is not my intention here to patronize either side of the question which the Doctor's *Free Inquiry* hath occasioned. All that concerns my argument is, barely to evince, and this I imagine hath been evinced, that, granting the Doctor's plea to be well founded, there is no presumption arising hence, which tends in the lowest degree to discre-

dit the miracles recorded in Holy writ; nay, that there is a contrary presumption. In further confirmation of this truth, let me ask, were there ever, in any region of the globe, any similar pretensions to miraculous powers, before that memorable *era*, the publication of the gospel? Let me ask again, since those pretensions ceased, hath it ever been in the power of the most daring enthusiast, to revive them anywhere in favour of a new system? Authentic miracles will, for a time, give a currency to counterfeits; but as the former become less frequent, the latter become more suspected, till at length they are treated with general contempt, and disappear. The danger then is, lest men, ever prone to extremes, become as extravagantly incredulous, as formerly they were credulous. *Laziness*, the true source of both, always inclines us to admit or reject in the *gross*, without entering on the irksome task of considering things in *detail*. In the first instance, knowing some such events to be true, they *admit all without examination*; in the second, knowing some to be false, they *reject all without examination*. A procedure this, which, however excusable in the un-

thinking herd, is altogether unworthy a philosopher.

But it may be thought, that the claim to miracles in the early ages of the church, continued too long to be supported solely on the credit of those performed by our Lord and his apostles. In order to account for this it ought to be attended to, that in the course of some centuries, the situation of affairs, with regard to religion, was really inverted. Education, and even superstition, and bigotry, and popularity, which the miracles of Christ and his apostles had to encounter, came gradually to be on the side of those wonders, said to have been performed in after times. If they were potent *enemies*, and such as, we have reason to believe, nothing but the force of truth could vanquish; they were also potent *allies*, and may well be supposed able to give a temporary triumph to falsehood, especially when it had few or no enemies to combat. But in discoursing on the prodigies said to have been performed in primitive times, I have been insensibly carried from the point, to which I proposed in this section to confine myself. From inquiring into miracles ascribed to new systems, I have proceeded to those pleaded in con-

firmation of systems previously established, and generally received.

LEAVING so remote a period, I propose, lastly, to inquire, whether, since that time, any heresiarch whatever, any founder of a new sect, or publisher of a new system, hath pretended to miraculous powers. If the essayist hath known of any such pretender, he surely would have mentioned him. But as he hath not afforded us any light on this subject, I shall just recal to the remembrance of my reader, those persons who, either as innovators or reformers, have made some figure in the church. They were the persons from whom, if from any, a plea of this kind might naturally have been expected; especially at a time when Europe was either plunged in barbarism, or but beginning to emerge out of it.

Was ever then this high prerogaive, the power of working miracles, claimed or exercised by the founders of the sects of the Waldenses and Albigenses? Did Wickliff in England pretend to it? Did Huss or Jerom in Bohemia? To come nearer modern times, Did Luther in Germany, Zuinglius in Switzerland, Calvin in France, or any

other of the reformers, advance this plea? Do such of them as are authors, mention in their writings any miracles they performed, or appeal to them as the evidences of their doctrine? Do contemporary historians allege, that they challenged the faith of their auditors, in consequence of such supernatural powers! I admit, if they did, that their miracles might be ascribed to a new system. For though they pretended only to re-establish the Christian institution, in its native purity, expunging those pernicious interpolations, which a false philosophy had foisted into the doctrinal part, and Pagan superstition into the moral and the ritual; yet as the religion they inculcated, greatly differed from the faith and worship of the times, it might, in this respect, be denominated a new system; and would be encountered by all the violence and prejudice, which novelties in religion never fail to excite. Not that the want of real miracles was a presumption against the truth of their doctrine. The God of nature, who is the God of Christians, does nothing in vain. No new revelation was pretended to; consequently there was no occasion for such supernatural support. They appealed to the revelation for-

merely bestowed, and by all parties acknowledged, as to the proper rule in this controversy: they appealed to the reason of mankind as the judge; and the reason of mankind was a competent judge of the conformity of their doctrine to this unerring rule.

But how, upon the author's principles, shall we account for this moderation in the reformers? Were they, in his judgment, calm inquirers into truth; were they dispassionate reasoners in defence of it? Far otherwise. He tells us, "They may safely "be pronounced to have been universally "inflamed with the highest enthusiasm."* And doubtless we cannot expect from this hand a more amiable picture of their disciples. May not we then, in our turn, safely pronounce, this writer himself being judge, that for a man to imagine he sees what hath no reality, to impose in this manner not only on his own understanding, but even on his external senses, is a pitch of delusion higher than the highest enthusiasm can produce, and is to be imputed only to downright frenzy.†

* History of Great Britain, James I, chap. 1.

† Perhaps it will be pleaded, that the working of miracles was considered by the leaders in the Reformation.

Since the world began, there hath not appeared a more general propension to the

tion as a Popish artifice, and as therefore worthy of being discarded with the other abuses which popery had introduced. That this was not the light in which miracles were viewed by Luther, who justly possesses the first place in the list of reformers, is evident from the manner in which he argues against Muncer, the apostle of the Anabaptists. This man, without ordination, had assumed the office of a christian pastor. Against this conduct Luther remonstrates, as being, in his judgment, an usurpation of the sacred function. "Let him "be asked," says he, "who made him a teacher of re-"ligion? If he answers, God; let him prove it by a "visible *miracle*: for it is by such signs that God de-"clares himself, when he gives an extraordinary mis-"sion." When this argument was afterwards retorted on himself by the Romanists, who desired to know how his own vocation, originally limited and dependent, had become not only unlimited, but quite independent of the hierarchy, from which he had received it; his reply was, that the *intrepidity* with which he had been enabled to brave so many dangers, and the *success* with which his enterprise had been crowned, ought to be regarded as miraculous: and indeed most of his followers were of this opinion. But whether this opinion was erroneous, or whether the argument against Muncer was conclusive, it is not my business to inquire. Thus much is evident from the story: *first*, That this reformer, far from rejecting miracles as a Romish trick, acknowledged, that in some religious questions, they are the only medium of proof: *secondly*, That notwith-

wildest fanaticism, a greater degree of credulity in every claim that was made to the illapsis of the Holy Spirit, or a more thorough contempt of all established modes of worship, than appeared in this island about the middle of the last century. It is astonishing, that when the minds of men were intoxicated with enthusiasm; when every new pretender to divine illumination was quickly surrounded by a crowd of followers, and his most incoherent effusions greedily swallowed as the dictates of the Holy Ghost; that in such a Babel of sectaries, none are to be found, who advanced a claim to the power of working miracles; a claim which, in the author's opinion, though false, is easily supported, and wonderfully successful, especially among enthusiasts. Yet, to Mr. Hume himself, who hath written the history of that

standing this, he never attempted, by a show of miracles, to impose on the senses of his hearers (if they were deceived in thinking that his success and magnanimity were miraculous, it was not their senses, but their understanding that was deceived): *lastly*, That the Anabaptists themselves, though perhaps the most outrageous fanatics that ever existed, did not pretend to the power of working miracles.——*Sleidan, lib.* 5. *Luth. De votis monast.* &c. *Epist. ad Frid. Sax. Ducem. ap. Chytraum.*

period, and who will not be accused of neglecting to mark the extravagancies effected by enthusiasm, I appeal whether this remark be just.

Will it be alleged as an exception, that one or two frantic people among the Quakers, not the leaders of the party, did actually pretend to such a power? Let it be remembered, that this conduct had no other consequences, but to bring upon the pretenders such a general contempt, as in that fanatical and gloomy age, the most unintellible jargon or glaring nonsense would never have been able to produce.

Will it be urged by the essayist, that even in the beginning of the present century, this plea was revived in Britain by the French prophets, a set of poor visionaries, who, by the barbarity with which they had been treated in their own country, had been wrought up to madness, before they took refuge in this? I must beg leave to remind him, that it is manifest, from the history of those delirious and unhappy creatures, that by no part of their conduct did they so effectually open the eyes of mankind, naturally credulous, discredit their own inspirations, and ruin their cause, as by this not

less foolish than presumptuous pretence. Accordingly, they are perhaps the only sect, which hath sprung up so lately, made so great a bustle for a while, and which is nevertheless at this day totally extinct. It deserves also to be remarked concerning this people, that though they were mad enough to imagine that they could restore a dead man to life; nay, though they proceeded so far, as to determine and announce beforehand the day and the hour of his resurrection; yet none of them were so distracted, as to imagine, that they had seen him rise; not one of them afterwards pretended, that their prediction had been fulfilled. Thus even a frenzy, which had quite disordered their intellects, could not in this instance overpower their senses.

UPON the whole, therefore, till some contrary example is produced, I may warrantably conclude,—that the religion of the BIBLE is the only religion extant, which claims to have been recommended by the evidence of *miracles*;—that though, in different ages and countries, numberless enthusiasts have arisen, extremely few have dared to advance this plea;—that wherever any have had the boldness to recur to

it, it hath proved the bane, and not the support of their cause. Thus it hath been evinced, as was proposed, that there is no presumption arising from the *history of the world*, which can in the least invalidate the argument from miracles, in defence of Christianity.

SECT. III.

No miracles recorded by historians of other religions are subversive of the evidence arising from the miracles wrought in proof of Christianity, or can be considered as contrary testimony.

"WHY is a miracle regarded as evidence "of a religious doctrine?" Or, "What con- "nection is there between an act of power "admitted to be supernatural, and the truth "of a proposition pronounced by the per- "son who exerts that power?" These are questions, which some of our infidels have exulted in as unanswerable: and they are questions, which it is proper to examine a little; not so much for their own sake, as because a satisfactory answer to them may throw light on the subject of this section.

A man, I suppose, of an unblemished cha-

racter, advanceth doctrines in religion, unknown before, but not in themselves apparently impious or absurd. We interrogate him about the manner wherein he attained the knowledge of those doctrines. He affirms, that by no process of reasoning, nor in any other natural way, did he discover them; but that they were revealed to him by the Spirit of God. It must be owned, there is a very strong presumption against the truth of what he says; and it is of consequence to inquire, whence that presumption ariseth. It is not primarily from any doubt of the man's integrity. If the fact he related were of an ordinary nature, the reputation he has hitherto maintained would secure him from being suspected of an intended deceit. It is not from any absurdity or immoral tendency we perceive in the doctrine itself. It ariseth principally, if not solely, from these two circumstances, the extreme uncommonness of such a revelation, and the great facility with which people of strong fancy may, in this particular, impose upon themselves. The man, I suppose acquaints us further, that God, when he communicated to him the truths he publishes, communicated also the power of working miracles,

such as, of giving sight to the blind, and hearing to the deaf, of raising the dead, and making whole the maimed. It is evident, that we have precisely the same presumption against his being endued with such a power, as against his having obtained such a revelation. Two things are asserted: there is one presumption, and but one, against them; and it equally affects them both. Whatever proves either assertion, removes the only presumption which hinders our belief of the other. The man, I suppose, lastly, performs the miracles before us, which he said he was commissioned to perform. We can no longer doubt of a supernatural communication. We have now all the evidence which the integrity of the person could give us, as to any ordinary event attested by him, that the doctrine he delivers as from God, is from God, and therefore true.

Nay, we have more evidence than for any common fact, vouched by a person of undoubted probity. As God is both almighty and all-wise, if he hath bestowed on any so uncommon a privilege, it is highly probable, that it is bestowed for promoting some end uncommonly important. And what more important end than to reveal to men that

which may be conducive to their present and eternal happiness? It may be said, that at most, it can only prove the interposal of some power superior to human: the being who interposeth is perhaps a bad being, and intends to deceive us. This, it may be allowed, is *possible*; but the other is *probable*. For, *first*, From the light of nature, we have no positive evidence of the existence of such intermediate beings, good or bad. Their existence is therefore only possible. Of the existence and perfections of God, we have the highest moral assurance. *Secondly*, If there were such beings, that raising the dead, and giving sight to the blind, should come within the verge of their power, is also but possible; that they are within the sphere of omnipotence is certain. *Thirdly*, Whatever seems to imply a suspension of any of the established laws of nature, we may presume with great appearance of reason, proceeds from the Author of nature, either *immediately*, or, which amounts to the same thing, *mediately*; that is, by the intervention of some agent empowered by him. To all these there will also accrue presumptions, not only, as was hinted already, from the character of the preacher, but from the apparent tendency of the doc-

trine, and from the effect it produceth on those who receive it. And now the connection between the miracle and the doctrine is obvious. The miracle removes the improbability of a supernatural communication, of which communication it is in fact an irrefragable evidence. This improbability, which was the only obstacle, being removed, the doctrine hath at least all the evidence of a common fact, attested by a man of known virtue and good sense.

In order to illustrate this further, I shall recur to the instance I have already had occasion to consider, of the Dutchman and the king of Siam. I shall suppose, that, besides the account given by the former of the freezing of water in Holland, he had informed the prince of the astonishing effects produced by gunpowder, with which the latter had been entirely unacquainted. Both accounts appear to him alike incredible, or, if you please, absolutely impossible. Sometime afterwards, the Dutchman gets imported into the kingdom a sufficient quantity of gunpowder, with the necessary artillery. He informs the monarch of this acquisition; who having permitted him to make experiments on some of his cattle and buildings, perceives, with inex-

pressible amazement, that all the European had told him, of the celerity and violence with which this destructive powder operates, is strictly conformable to truth. I ask any considerate person, Would not this be enough to restore the stranger to the Indian's good opinion, which, I suppose, his former experienced honesty had entitled him to? Would it not remove the incredibility of the account he had given of the freezing of water in northern countries? Yet, if abstractly considered, what connection is there between the effects of gunpowder and the effects of cold? But the presumption arising from miracles, in favour of the doctrine published by the performer, as divinely inspired, must be incomparably stronger; since, from what hath been said, it appears to have several peculiar circumstances, which add weight to it. It is evident, then, that miracles are a proper proof, and perhaps the only proper proof, of revelation from Heaven. But it is also evident, that miracles may be wrought for other purposes, and may not be intended as proofs of any doctrine whatsoever.

THUS much being premised, I shall exa-

mine another very curious argument of the essayist: "There is no testimony," says he, "for any prodigy, that is not opposed by "an infinite number of witnesses; so that "not only the miracle destroys the credit of "the testimony, but even the testimony de-"stroys itself."* In order to illustrate this strange position, he observes, that, "in mat-"ters of religion, whatever is different is "contrary; and that it is impossible the re-"ligions of ancient Rome, of Turkey, of "Siam, and of China, should all or them "be established on any solid foundation. "Every miracle, therefore, pretended to have "been wrought in any of these religions, "(and all of them abound in miracles) as "its direct scope is to establish the particular "system to which it is attributed, so it has "the same force, though more indirectly, to "overthrow every other system. In destroy-"ing a rival system, it likewise destroys the "credit of those miracles, on which that sys-"tem was established; so that all the prodi-"gies of different religions are to be regarded "as contrary facts, and the evidences of these "prodigies, whether weak or strong, as op-"posite to each other." Never did an au-

* P. 190, &c.

nor more artfully avail himself of indefinite expressions. With what admirable sleight does he vary his phrases so as to make the inadvertent reader look upon them as synonymous, when in fact their significations are totally distinct? Thus what, by a most extraordinary idiom, is called at first, "miracles wrought in a religion," we are next to regard, as "miracles attributed to a particular system," and lastly, as "miracles the direct scope of which is to establish that "system." Every body, I will venture to say, in beginning to read the sentence, if he forms any notion of what the author means by a "miracle wrought in a religion," understands it barely as a "miracle wrought "among those who profess a particular reli- "gion," the words appearing to be used in the same latitude, as when we call the traditional tales current among the Jews, though they should have no relation to religion, Jewish tales; and those, in like manner, Mahometan or Pagan tales, which are current among Mahometans or Pagans. Such a miracle, the reader, ere he is aware, is brought to consider as a miracle attributed to a particular system; nay further, as "a miracle, "the direct scope of which is to establish

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" that system." Yet nothing can be conceived more different than the meaning of these expressions, which are here jumbled together as equivalent.

It is plain, that all the miracles of which there is any record, come under the first denomination. They are all supposed to have been wrought before men, or among men; and wherever there are men, there is religion of some kind or other. Perhaps too all may, in a very *improper* sense, be attributed to a religious system. They all imply an interruption of the ordinary course of nature. Such an interruption, wherever it is observed, will be ascribed to the agency of those divinities that are adored by the observers, and so may be said to be attributed by them to their own system. But where are the miracles (those of holy writ excepted) of which you can say, with propriety, it is their direct scope to establish a particular system? Must we not then be strangely blinded by the charm of a few ambiguous terms, if we are made to confound things so widely different? Yet this confusion is the very basis on which the author founds his reasoning, and rears this tremendous doctrine, That " a miracle of Mahomet, or any

of his successors," and, by parity of reason, a miracle of Christ, or any of his apostles, "is refuted (as if it had been mentioned, and had, in express terms, been contradicted) by the testimony of Titus Livius, Plutarch, Tacitus, and of all the authors, Chinese, Grecian, and Roman Catholic, who have related any miracles in their particular religions." Here all the miracles, that have been related by men of different religions, are blended as coming under the common denomination of miracles, the direct scope of which was to establish those particular religious systems; an insinuation, in which there is not even the shadow of truth.

That the reader may be satisfied on this point, I must beg his attention to the following observations concerning the miracles of profane history. *First*, Many facts are related as miraculous, where we may admit the fact, without acknowledging the miracle. Instances of this kind we have in relations concerning comets, eclipses, meteors, earthquakes, and such like. *Secondly*, The miracles may be admitted as genuine, and the manner in which historians account for them, rejected as absurd. The one is a matter of testimony,

the other of conjecture. In this a man is influenced by education, by prejudices, by received opinions. In every country, as was observed already, men will recur to the theology of the place, for the solution of every phenomenon supposed miraculous. But, that it was the scope of the miracle to support the theology, is one thing; and that fanciful men thought they discovered in the theology the causes of the miracle, is another. The inhabitants of Lystra accounted, from the principles of their own religion, for the miracles performed in their city by Paul and Barnabas. * Was it therefore the scope of that miracle to support the Lycaonian religion? *Thirdly*, Many miracles are recorded, as produced directly by Heaven, without the ministration of men: by what construction are they discovered to be proofs of a particular system? Yet these also, wherever they happen, will be accounted for by the natives of the country, from the principles of their own superstition. Had any of the Pagan citizens escaped the ruin in which Sodom was miraculously involved, they would doubtless have sought for the cause of this destruction in the established mode of polytheism, and

* Acts xiv, 8, &c.

ld probably have imputed it to the venge-
: of some of their deities, incurred by
neglect of some frivolous ceremony.
uld it therefore have been the scope of
miracle to confirm this nonsense? *Fourth-*
Even miracles said to have been perform-
y a man, are no evidences of the truth
hat man's opinions; such, I mean, as he
ends not to have received by revelation,
by the exercise of reason, by education,
y information from other men; no more
ı a man's being endowed with bodily
ngth greater than ordinary, would prove
to be superior to others in his mental fa-
ies. I conclude with declaring, that if
ances shall be produced of miracles
ught by men of probity, in proof of doc-
es which they affirm to have been reveal-
:o them from Heaven, and which are re-
nant to the doctrine of the Bible, then I
ll think it equitable to admit, that reli-
ıs miracles contradict one another. Then
. reasonable people be reduced to the di-
ıma, either of disproving the allegations
one side, or of acknowledging that mi-
les can be no evidence of revelation. No
:mpt, however, hath as yet been made by

any writer to produce an instance of this kind.

"But will nothing less satisfy," replies the author. "Will not the predictions of augurs and oracles, and the intimations said "to have been given by the gods or saints "in dreams and visions, of things not otherwise knowable by those to whom they were "thus intimated; will not these, and such "like prodigies, serve in some degree as evidence?" As evidence of what? Shall we say, of any religious principles conveyed at the same time by revelation? No, it is not even pretended that there were any such principles so conveyed; but as evidence of principles which had been long before entertained, and which were originally imbibed from education, and from education only. That the evidence here, supposing the truth of the facts, is at best but very indirect, and by no means on the same footing with that of the miracles recorded in the gospel, might be easily evinced, if there were occasion. But there is in reality no occasion, since there is no such evidence of the facts as can justly entitle them to our notice. Let it be remembered, that, in the fourth section of the first part, it was shewn, that there is the

eatest disparity in respect of evidence, be-
ixt miracles performed in proof of a reli-
on *to be* established, and in *contradiction* to
inions generally received; and miracles
rformed, on the contrary, in support of a
igion *already* established, and in *confirma-*
n of opinions generally received; that, in
: former case, there is the strongest pre-
nption *for* the miracles, in the latter *against*
:m. Let it also be remembered, that in
e preceding section, it was shewn, that the
igion of the Bible is the only religion ex-
it, which claims to have been ushered in-
the world by miracles; that this preroga-
e neither the Pagan religion, the Maho-
:tan, nor the Roman Catholic, can, with
y appearance of reason, arrogate; and that,
consequence, there is one of the strongest
sumptions possible *for* the miracles of the
spel, which is not only wanting in the mi-
:les of other religions, but which is con-
sted by the strongest presumption possible
ainst these miracles. And though this pre-
nption should not, in all cases, be account-
absolutely insuperable, we must at least
, it gives an immense superiority to the
oofs of Christianity. It were an endless
d a fruitless task, to canvass particularly

the evidence of all the pretended miracles either of Paganism or Popery (for on this head Mahometism is much more modest); but as the author hath selected some, which he considers as the best attested of both religions, these shall be examined severally in the two subsequent Sections. From this examination a tolerable judgment may be formed concerning the pretensions of these two species of superstition.

But from what hath been said, it is evident, that the contrariety which the author pretends to have discovered in the miracles said to have been wrought, as he expresseth it, in different religions, vanishes entirely on a close inspection. He is even sensible of this himself; and, as is customary with orators, the more inconclusive his reasons are, so much the more positive are his assertions. "This argument," says he, "may appear "over subtile and refined;" indeed so subtile and refined, that it is invisible altogether; "*but*——is not *in reality* different "from the reasoning of a judge, who sup- "poses that the credit of two witnesses "maintaining a crime against any one, is "destroyed by the testimony of two others, "who affirm him to have been two hundred

" leagues distant, at the same instant when " the crime is said to have been committed." After the particle *but*, with which this clause begins, the reader naturally expects such an explication of the argument, as will convince him, that though *subtile* and *refined*, it hath *solidity* and *strength*. Instead of this, he hath only the author's *word* warranting it to be good to all intents: " But is *not in reality* different," &c. The analogy between his *example* and his *argument* seems to be but very distant; I shall, therefore, without any comment, leave it with the reader as I find it.

THUS it appears, that, for aught the author hath as yet proved, no miracles recorded by historians of other religions are subversive of the evidence arising from the miracles wrought in proof of Christianity, or can justly be considered as contrary testimony.

SECT. IV.

Examination of the PAGAN *Miracles mentioned by Mr. Hume.*

SHOULD one read attentively the *Essay on Miracles*, and consider it solely as a philoso-

phical disquisition on an abstract question, like most of the other pieces in the same collection; he could not fail to wonder what had induced the author so suddenly to change sides in the debate, and, by doing so, to contradict himself in terms the most express. Does he not, in the latter part of that performance, as warmly contend for the reality of some miracles, as he had pleaded in the former part, for the *impossibility* of all? It is true, he generally concludes concerning those, that they are gross "and palpable falsehoods." But this serves only to render his conduct the more mysterious, as that conclusion is always preceded by an attempt to evince, that we have the greatest reason to receive them as "certain "and infallible truths." Nay, so entirely doth his *zeal* make him forget even his most positive assertions, (and what inconsistencies may not be dreaded from an excess of *zeal!*) that he shows minutely we have those very evidences for the miracles he is pleased to patronize, which he had strenuously argued, were not to be found in support of any miracles whatever.

"There is not to be found," he affirms, *

* P. 183.

"in all history, a miracle attested by a sufficient number of men, of such unquestioned good sense, education, and learning, as to secure us against all delusion in themselves; of such undoubted integrity, as to place them beyond all suspicion of any design to deceive others; of such credit and reputation in the eyes of mankind, as to have a great deal to lose, in case of being detected in any falsehood; and at the same time attesting facts performed in such a public manner, and in so celebrated a part of the world, as to render the detection unavoidable." We need only turn over a few pages of the *Essay*, and we shall find the author taking great pains to convince us, that all these circumstances concurred in support of certain miracles, which, notwithstanding his *general resolution*, he has thought fit to honour with a very particular attention.

He has not indeed told us *how many* witnesses, in his way of reckoning, will constitute "a sufficient number;" but for some miracles which he relates, he gives us *clouds* of witnesses, one cloud succeeding another; for the Molinists, who tried to discredit them, "soon found themselves overwhelmed by a

"cloud of *new* witnesses, one hundred and "twenty in number." * As to the character of the witnesses, "most of them were "persons of credit and substance in Paris:" † again, those miracles "were attested by "witnesses of credit and distinction, before "judges of unquestioned integrity;" ‡ and "they were proved by witnesses before the "officiality or bishop's court of Paris, under "the eyes of Cardinal Noailles, whose character for integrity and capacity was never "contested even by his enemies:" § again, "the secular clergy of France, particularly "the rectors or *curés* of Paris, give testimony to these impostures, than whom no "clergy are more celebrated for strictness "of life and manners." ‖ Once more, one principal witness, ". *Monsieur de* Montgeron, "was counsellor or judge of the parliament "of Paris, a man of figure and character:" ¶ another, "no less a man than the *Duc de* "Chatillon, a Duke and Peer of France, of "the highest rank and family." ** It is strange, if *credit*, and *substance*, and *distinction*, and *capacity*, are not sufficient securities to us, that the witnesses were not "them-

* P. 197 in the note. † Ib. ‡ P. 195.
§ P. 196, in the note. ‖ P. 199, in the note.
¶ P. 195, in the note. ** P. 199, in the note.

" selves deluded ;" it is strange, if *uncontested integrity*, and *eminent strictness* of life and manners, cannot remove " all suspicion of " any design in them to deceive others ;" it is strange, if one who was *counsellor* of the parliament of Paris, a man of figure and character, and if another, who was a Duke and Peer of France, of the highest rank and family, had not " a great deal to lose, in " case of being detected in any falsehood :" nay, and if all those witnesses of *credit* and *distinction* " had not also a great deal to " lose ;" " since the Jesuits, a learned body, " supported by the civil magistrate, were " determined enemies to those opinions, in " whose favour the miracles were said to " have been wrought ;" * and since " *Mon-* " *sieur* Herault, the Lieutenant *de Police*, of " whose great reputation, all who have been " in France about that time, have heard ; " and whose vigilance, penetration, activity, " and extensive intelligence, have been " much talked of ; since this magistrate, " who by the nature of his office is almost " absolute, was invested with full powers on " purpose to suppress these miracles, and " frequently seized and examined the wit-

* P. 175.

" nesses and subjects of them; though he " could never reach any thing satisfactory " against them."* As to the only remaining circumstance, " their being performed in a " public manner, and in a celebrated part of " the world," this concurred also. They were performed, we are told, " in a learned " age, and on the most eminent theatre that " is now in the world;" † besides, " twenty- " two rectors or *curés* of Paris, with infinite " earnestnesss, pressed the Archbishop, an " enemy to the Jansenists, to examine those " miracles, which they assert to be known " to the whole world, and indisputably cer- " tain." ‡

Thus the essayist hath laid us under the disagreeable necessity of inferring, that he is either very rash in his general assertions, or useth very great amplification in his particular narrations. Perhaps in both inferences we shall find, upon inquiry, that there is some truth. In his *History of Great Britain*, he gives us notice, § that he addressed himself " to a more distant posterity than will ever " be reached by any local or temporary theo- " logy." Why did he not likewise, in writing the *Essays*, entertain this grand idea? It

* P. 197, in the note.
† P. 195.
‡ P. 196, in the note.
§ James i, chap 2.

would have been of use to him. It would have prevented his falling into those inconsistencies which his too great attention and antipathy to what he calls a *local or temporary theology*, only could occasion; and which, when that theology, according to his hypothesis, shall be extinct, and when all our religious controversies shall be forgotten, must appear unaccountable and ridiculous. People will not then have the means of discovering, what is so obvious to us, his contemporaries, that he only assumes the appearance of an advocate for some miracles, which are disbelieved by the generality of Protestants, his countrymen, in order, by the comparison, to vilify the miracles of sacred writ, which are acknowledged by them.

BUT to descend to particulars, I shall begin with considering those miracles for which the author is indebted to the ancient Pagans. First, In order to convince us how easy a matter it is for cunning and impudence to impose by false miracles on the credulity of barbarians, he introduces the story of Alexander of Pontus.* The justness of the account he gives of this impostor, from Lucian,

* P. 188, &c.

I shall not dispute. But that it may appear, how little the Christian religion is affected by this relation, notwithstanding some insinuations he hath intermixed with it, I shall make the following remarks.—

It is of importance to know, what was the profession of this once so famous, though now forgotten, Paphlagonian? Was he a publisher of strange gods? No.* Was he the founder of a new system in religion? No. What was he then? He was no other than a professed fortune-teller. What were the arts by which he carried on this gainful trade? The essayist justly remarks, that "it was a "wise policy in him, to lay the first scene of "his impostures in a country where the peo-

* The learned and judicious author of the *Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of Saint Paul*, hath inadvertently said of Alexander, that he introduced a *new god* into Pontus. The truth is, he only exhibited a reproduction of *Esculapius*, a well known deity in those parts, to whom he gave indeed the *new name* GLYCON. In this there was nothing unsuitable to the genius of the mythology. Accordingly, we do not find, that either the priests, or the people, were in the least alarmed for the religion of the country, or ever charged Alexander as an *innovator* in religious matters. On the contrary, the greatest enemies he had to encounter, were not the religionists, but the latitudinarians.

" ple were extremely ignorant and stupid, " and ready to swallow the grossest delu- " sion." For, " had Alexander fixed his re- " sidence at Athens, the philosophers of that " renowned mart of learning had immediate- " ly spread through the whole Roman em- " pire their sense of the matter; which, be- " ing supported by so great authority, and " displayed by all the force of reason and " eloquence, had entirely opened the eyes " of mankind." I shall beg leave to remark another instance of good policy in him. He attempted not to gain the veneration of the multitude by opposing, but by adopting their religious prejudices. His whole plan of deceit was founded in the established superstition. The author himself will acknowledge, it would have been extreme folly in him to have acted otherwise: and all the world, I believe, will agree in thinking, that, in that case, he could not have had the smallest probability of success. What were the miracles he wrought? I know of none, unless we will dignify with that name, some feats of legerdemain, performed mostly by candlelight; which, in many parts of Europe, we may daily see equalled, nay far exceeded, by those of modern jugglers. Add to these

some oracles he pronounced, concerning which, if we may form a judgment from the account and specimen given us by Lucian, we should conclude, that, like other Heathen oracles, they were generally unintelligible, equivocal, or false. Before whom did he exhibit his wonders? Before none, if he could help it, that were not thorough believers in the popular system. His nocturnal mysteries were always introduced with an AVAUNT to *Atheists*, *Christians*, and *Epicureans*: and indeed it was dangerous for any such to be present at them. Mr. Hume says, that "from his ignorant Paphlagonians, he "was enabled to proceed to the enlisting of "votaries among the Grecian philosophers." On what authority he advances this, I have not been able to discover. He adds, "and "men of the most eminent rank and di-"stinction in Rome." Lucian mentions one man of rank, Rutilianus, among the votaries of the prophet; an honest man he calls him, but at the same time the weakest, the most superstitious, that ever lived. As to the military expedition, which one would imagine from Mr. Hume's expression, the Emperor had resolved on, in consequence of the encouragement which the delusive prophecies

of this impostor gave him, we find, on the contrary, it was undertaken before those prophecies were uttered. But further, Did Alexander risk any thing in assuming the character of the *interpreter* of Esculapius? Did he lose, or did he suffer any thing in defence of it? Quite the reverse. He enriched himself by this most ingenious occupation. I shall say nothing of the picture which Lucian gives of his morals, of the many artifices which he used, or of the atrocious crimes which he perpetrated. It must be owned, that the principal scope for calumny and detraction is in what concerns the private life and moral character. Lucian was an enemy, and, by his own account, had received the highest provocation. But I avoid every thing, on this topic, that can admit a question.

Where, I would gladly know, lies the resemblance between this impostor and the first publishers of the gospel? Every one, on the most superficial review, may discover, that, in all the material circumstances, they are perfect contrasts. There appears not, therefore, to be great danger in the poignant remark with which the author concludes this relation: "Though *much to be wished*, it does

"not always happen, that every *Alexander* "meets with a *Lucian*, ready to expose and "detect his impostures." Lest the full import of this emphatical clause should not be apprehended, the author hath been still more explicit in the note: "It may here perhaps "be objected, that I proceed rashly, and "form my notions of Alexander, merely "from the account given of him by Lucian, "a professed enemy. *It were indeed to be "wished*, that some of the accounts published by his followers and accomplices had "remained. The opposition and contrast "betwixt the character and conduct of the "same man, as drawn by a friend or an ene"my, is as strong, even in common life, "much more in these religious matters, as "that betwixt any two men in the world, "betwixt Alexander and S^t. Paul for in"stance." Who can forbear to lament the uncommon distress of an author, obliged every moment to recur to unavailing wishes? Mr. Hume, however, in this calamitous situation, solaceth himself, as well as he can, by supposing what he cannot assert. He supposeth what would have been the case, if his wishes could have been gratified; and artfully insinuates, in this manner, to his readers,

that if we had the character and conduct of the apostle, delineated by as able an enemy as Lucian, we should find the portrait as ugly as that of Alexander.

Let us then for once suppose, what the author so ardently wishes, that such an enemy had undertaken the history of Paul of Tarsus. I can easily conceive what a different representation we should, in that case, have had, of the mental endowments and moral disposition, as well as of the inducements and views of this Christian missionary. I can conceive also, that both his actions and discourses might have been strangely disfigured. But if the biographer had maintained any regard, I say not, to truth, but to probability; there are some things, we may be absolutely certain, he would never have advanced. He would not surely have said of Paul, that he was by profession a cunning man, or *conjurer;* one who, for a little money, either told people their fortunes, or taught them how to recover stolen goods. He would not, I suppose, have pretended, that wherever the apostle went, he flattered the superstition of the populace, in order to gain them, and founded all his pretensions on the popular system. He would

not have alleged, that Paul *enriched* himself, or that he could never have the prospect of enriching himself, by his vocation; nay, or that he risked nothing, or suffered nothing, by it. He could not have said concerning him, that he *declined* the audience or scrutiny of men, whose opinions in religion differed from those on which his mission was founded. He durst not have imputed to him the *wise policy* of laying the scene of his impostures, only where ignorance, barbarism, and stupidity prevailed; as it is unquestionable, that our apostle traversed great part, not only of Asia Minor, but of Macedonia and Achaia; fixed his residence eighteen months at Corinth, a city not less celebrated for the polite arts, than for its populousness and riches; preached publicly at Athens, before the Stoics and the Epicureans, and even before the Areopagus, the most venerable judicature in Greece; not afraid of what the philosophers of that renowned mart of learning, might spread through the whole Roman empire, concerning him and his doctrine; nay, and lastly, preached at Rome itself, the mistress and metropolis of the world.

The reader will observe, that, in this comparison, I have shunned every thing that is

of a private, and therefore of a dubious nature. The whole is founded on such actions and events as were notorious; which it is not in the power of contemporary historians to falsify; such with regard to Alexander, as a *votary* could not have dissembled; such with regard to Paul, as an *enemy* durst not have denied. We are truly indebted to the essayist, who, intending to exhibit a *rival* to the apostle, hath produced a character which, we find on making the comparison, serves only for a foil. Truth never shines with greater lustre, than when confronted with falsehood. The evidence of our religion, how strong soever, appears not so irresistible, considered by itself, as when by comparison we perceive, that none of those artifices and circumstances attended its propagation, which the whole course of experience shows to be necessary to render imposture successful.

THE next topic on which the ingenious author hath bestowed some flourishes, is the miracle "which Tacitus reports of Vespa-"sian, who cured a blind man in Alexan-"dria, by means of his spittle, and a lame "man by the mere touch of his foot, in

"obedience to a vision of the god Serapis, "who had enjoined them to have recourse "to the emperor, for these miraculous and "extraordinary cures."* The story he introduces with informing us, that it is "one "of the best attested miracles in all pro-"fane history." If so, it will the better serve for a sample of what may be expected from that quarter. "Every circumstance," he tells us, "seems to add weight to the testi-"mony, and might be displayed at large, "with all the force of argument and elo-"quence, if any one were now concerned "to enforce the evidence of that exploded "and idolatrous superstition." For my part, were I concerned to enforce the evidence of that exploded and idolatrous superstition, I should not wish the story were in better hands than in the author's. He is by no means deficient in eloquence; and if sometimes there appear a deficiency in argument, that is not imputable to him, but to the subject, which cannot furnish him with any better; and though I do not suspect him to be in the least concerned to re-establish Paganism, yet it is well known, that hatred to his adversary may as strongly animate an

* P. 192, &c.

advocate to exert himself, as affection to his client.

But to proceed to the story: First, the author pleads "the gravity, solidity, age, "and probity of so great an emperor, who, "through the whole course of his life con- "versed in a familiar way with his friends "and courtiers, and never affected those ex- "traordinary airs of divinity, assumed by "Alexander and Demetrius." To this character, the justness of which I intend not to controvert, I shall beg leave to add, what is equally indubitable, and much to the purpose, that no emperor showed a stronger inclination to corroborate his title by the sanction of the gods, than the prince of whom he is speaking. This, doubtless, he thought the more necessary in his case, as he was of an obscure family, and nowise related to any of his predecessors. How fond he was of pleading *visions*, and *presages*, and *auguries*, in his favour, all the world knows.*

The author adds, "The historian, a con-

* Auctoritas, et quasi majestas quædam, ut scilicet inopinato et adhuc novo principi deerat, hæc quoque accessit. SUETON.

"temporary writer, noted for candour and "veracity, and withal the greatest and most "penetrating genius perhaps of all anti-"quity, and so free from any tendency to "superstition and credulity, that he even "lies under the contrary imputation of "atheism and profaneness." This would say a great deal, if the character of the historian were of any moment in the question. Doth Tacitus pretend that he was himself a witness of the miracle? No. Doth he mention it as a thing which he believes? No. In either case, I acknowledge, that the reputation of the *relater* for candour and penetration, must have added weight to the relation, whether considered as his *testimony*, or barely as his *opinion*. But is it fair to plead the veracity of the writer in proof of every popular rumour mentioned by him? His veracity is only concerned to satisfy us, that it was actually reported, as he relates; or that the attempt was made, and the miracle pretended; a point which, I presume, nobody would have disputed, although the authority had been less than that of Tacitus. Indeed, the historian doth not say directly, whether he believes the miracle or not; but, by his manner of telling it, he

plainly insinuates, that he thought it ridiculous. In introducing it, he intimates the utility of such reports to the emperor's cause. "By which," says he, "the favour "of Heaven, and the appointment of the "gods, might be urged in support of his "title."* When he names the god *Serapis*, as warning the blind man to recur to Vespasion, he adds, in evident contempt and derision of his godship, "Who is adored "above all others by the *Egyptians*, a "people addicted to superstition."† Again he speaks of the emperor, as induced to hope for success, by the persuasive tongues of flatterers.‡ A serious believer of the miracle would hardly have used such a style in relating it. But to what purpose did he then relate it? The answer is easy. Nothing could be more characteristic of the *Emperor*, or could better show the arts he had recourse to, and the hold which flattery had of him; nothing could be more characteristic of the *Alexandrians*, the people amongst

* Qucis cœlestis favor, et quædam in Vespasianum inclinatio numinum ostenderetur.

† Quem dedita superstitionibus gens ante alios colit.

‡ Vocibus adulantium in spem induci.

whom the miracle is said to have been wrought.

"The person," says the essayist, "from "whose testimony he related the miracle, "of established character for judgment and "veracity, *as we may well suppose*; eye-wit- "nesses of the fact, and confirming their "verdict, after the Flavian family were de- "spoiled of the empire, and could no longer "give any reward as the price of a lie." Persons of *established character for judgment and veracity!* Who told Mr. Hume so? It was not Tacitus. He only denominates them in general:* "They who were present," and "a crowd of bystanders." The author, conscious that he advances this without even the shadow of authority, hath subjoined, in order to palliate the matter, *as we may well suppose.* An admirable expedient for supplying a weak plea, with those convenient circumstances that can give it strength! When fact fails, which is not seldom the case, we need but apply to supposition, whose help is always near. But if this be allowed to take the place of argument, I see no reason why I may not avail myself of the privilege of supposing, as well as the author.

* Qui interfuere,—— Quæ astabat multitudo.

The witnesses then, I will suppose, were mostly an ignorant rabble: but I wrong my cause; I have a better foundation than supposal, having Tacitus himself, and all antiquity on my side, when I add, deeply immersed in *superstition*, particularly attached to the worship of *Serapis*, and keenly engaged in support of *Vespasian*, ALEXANDRIA having been the first city of note that publicly declared for him. Was it then matter of surprise, that a story, which at once soothed the superstition of the populace, and favoured their political schemes, should gain ground among them? Can we justly wonder, that the wiser few, who were not deceived, should connive at, or even contribute to promote a deceit, which was highly useful to the cause wherein themselves were embarked, and at the same time highly grateful to the many? Lastly, Can we be surprised that any, who, for seven-and-twenty years, had, from motives of interest, and ambition, and popularity, propagated a falsehood, should not afterwards be willing to expose themselves as liars?

The author finishes the story thus: "To "which, if we add the public nature of the "facts related, it will appear, that no evi-

" dence can well be supposed stronger for " so gross and so palpable a falsehood." As to the nature of the facts, we are told by Tacitus, that when Vespasian consulted the physicians, whether such maladies were curable by human art, they declared,* that in the one the power of sight was not extinct, " but would return, were the obstacles re- " moved; that in the other, the joints had " suffered some dislocation, which, by a sa- " lutary pressure, might be redressed." From this account we are naturally led to conclude, that the disorders were not so conspicuous; but that either they might have been feigned, where they were not; or that cures might have been pretended, where none were performed. I think it is even a further presumption of the truth of this conclusion, that Suetonius, the only other Roman historian who mentions the miracle (I know not how he hath been overlooked by Mr. Hume), differs from Tacitus, in the account he gives of the lameness. The one represents it as being in the hand, the other, as in the leg,†

* Huic non exesam vim luminus, et redituram si pellerentur obstantia, illi elapsos in pravum artus, si salubris vis adhibeatur, posse integrari.

† Manum æger. TACITUS. Debili crure. SUETONIUS.

There are other circumstances regarding this story, on which I might make some remarks; but shall forbear, as it is impossible to enter into a minute discussion of particulars, that appear but trivial, when considered severally, without growing tiresome to the bulk of readers. I shall therefore only subjoin these simple questions: *First*, What emperor or other potentate was flattered in his dignity and pretensions by the miracles of our Lord? What eminent personage found himself interested to support, by his authority and influence, the credit of these miracles? *Again*, What popular superstition or general and rooted prejudices were they calculated to confirm? These two circumstances, were there no other, make the greatest odds imaginable betwixt the miracles of VESPASIAN and those of JESUS CHRIST.

So much for the PAGAN miracles mentioned by the author.

TONIUS. Mr. Hume, in the last edition of the *Essay*, mentions Suetonius, but takes no notice of this difference between his account and that of Tacitus.

SECT. V.

Examination of the POPISH *Miracles mentioned by Mr. Hume.*

THE author soon descends from ancient to modern times, and leaving *Paganism*, recurs to *Popery*, a much more fruitful source of lying wonders.

THE first of this kind he takes notice of,* is a Spanish miracle recorded in the memoirs of Cardinal *de Retz*. The story, he says, is very memorable, and may well deserve our consideration. "When that intriguing politician fled into Spain, to avoid the persecution of his enemies, he passed through Saragossa, the capital of Arragon; where he was shewn in the cathedral church, a man, who had served twenty years as a door-keeper of the church, and was well known to every body in town, that had ever paid their devotions at that cathedral. He had been for so long a time wanting a leg; but recovered that limb, by the rubbing of holy oil upon the stump; *and, when the cardinal examined it, he found*

* P. 193, &c.

'*it to be a true natural leg, like the other.*" Would not any person imagine, from the last words of this sentence, that the cardinal had ordered the man to put off his shoes and stockings, that, by touch, as well as by sight, he might be satisfied, there was no artifice used, but that both his legs consisted of genuine flesh and bone? Yet the truth is, his eminency did not think it worth while to examine any one circumstance of this wonderful narration, but contented himself with reporting it precisely as it had been told him. His words literally translated are, "In that 'church they shewed me a man, whose bu-'siness it was to light the lamps, of which 'they have a prodigious number, telling me, 'that he had been seen seven years at the 'gate, with one leg only. I saw him there 'with two."* Not one word of trial or examination, or even so much as a single question asked on the subject; not a syllable of his finding the leg to be either true or false, natural or artificial, like the other or unlike. I have

* L'on m'y montra un homme, qui servoit à allumer les lampes, qui y sont en nombre pro[illegible] l'on me dit, qu'on l'y avoit vu sept ans [illegible] eglise, avec une seule jambe. J[illegible] *Liv.* 4, *Pan* 1654.

a better opinion both of the candour and of the good sense of Mr. Hume, than to imagine, he would have designedly misrepresented this story, in order to render it fitter for his purpose. I believe the source of this error hath been solely the trusting to his memory in the relation which he gave, and not taking the trouble to consult the passage in the memoirs. This conjecture appears the more probable, as he hath made some other alterations, which are nowise conducive to his design; such as, that the man had been seen in the church *twenty* years wanting a leg, and that he was a *door-keeper;* whereas the memoir-writer says only *seven* years, and that he was one *who lighted the lamps.**

"This miracle was vouched," says the author, "by all the canons of the church; and "the whole company in town were appeal-"ed to, for a confirmation of the fact, whom

* Since finishing this tract, I have seen an edition of Mr. Hume's Essays, &c. latter than that here referred to. It is printed at London 1760. I must do the author the justice to observe, that, in this edition, he hath corrected the mistake, as to the cardinal's examining the man's leg, of which he only says, "The cardinal "assures us, that he saw him with two legs." He still calls him a *door-keeper* and says, that he had served *twenty* years in this capacity.

" the cardinal found, by their zealous devo-
" tion, to be thorough believers of the mi-
" racle." It is true, that the company in town were appealed to, by those ecclesiastics; but it is also true, that *de Retz*, by his own account, seems not to have asked any man a question on the subject. He acknowledges indeed, that an anniversary festival, instituted in commemoration of the miracle, was celebrated by a vast concourse of people of all ranks.

" Here," continues the essayist, " the re-
" later was also contemporary to the suppos-
" ed prodigy, of an incredulous and libertine
" character, as well as of great genius." But of what weight, in this affair, is either the genius or the incredulity of the relater, since, by Mr. Hume's confession, he had no faith in the relation? Strange, indeed, is the use which the essayist makes of this circumstance. What " *adds mightily*," says he, " to the force of
" the evidence, and may double our surprise
" on this occasion, is, that the cardinal him-
" self, who relates the story, seems not to
" give any credit to it." It doth not in the least surprise me, that the cardinal gives no credit to this relation; but I am beyond measure surprised, that Mr. Hume should repre-

sent this circumstance as *adding mightily* to the force of the evidence. Is then a story, which is reported by a man of genius, the more credible that he doth not believe it? Or, Is it the more incredible that he doth believe it? What would the author have said, if the cardinal had told us, that he gave credit to the relation? Might he not, in that case, have very pertinently pleaded the great genius, and penetration, and incredulity of the relater, as *adding mightily* to the force of the evidence? On that hypothesis, he surely might, for pretty obvious reasons: Uncommon penetration qualifies a man for detecting fraud; and it requires evidence greater than ordinary to surmount incredulity. The belief, therefore, of such a person as the cardinal, who had not only the means of discovering an imposture, as he was contemporary and on the spot, but the ability to discover it, as he was a man of genius, and not over-credulous; his belief, I say, would evidently have been no small presumption of the truth of the miracle. How his disbelief can be in like manner a presumption of its truth, is to me incomprehensible. Ay, but rejoins the author, "as he seems "not to give any credit to it, he cannot be

" suspected of any concurrence in the holy " fraud." Very well. I am satisfied that a man's TESTIMONY is the *more* to be regarded, that he is above being suspected of concurring in *any fraud*, call it holy or unholy. But I want to know why, on the very same account, his OPINION is *the less* to be regarded. For my part, I find no difficulty in believing every article of the narration for which the cardinal gives his testimony; notwithstanding this, I may be of the same opinion with him; that the account given by the dean and canons, which is their testimony, not his, was all a fiction. But it is not with the cardinal's *testimony* we are here concerned: about that there is no dispute. It is with his *opinion.* Are then a man's sentiments about a matter of fact, I must insist on it, the less worthy of regard, either because he is a man of genius, and not at all credulous, or because he cannot be suspected of any concurrence in a holy fraud? Are they the more improbable on these accounts? The essayist, when he reflects, will be the last man in the world, that would assist in establishing a maxim so unfavourable, not only to candour, but even to genius and scepticism: and indeed there are

few, if any, that would be greater sufferers by it than himself.

But leaving this, as one of the unfathomable depths of the essay, I proceed to the other circumstances. "The miracle," says the author, "of so singular a nature, as "could *scarce* admit of a counterfeit." He did well at least to use the word *scarce*; for if every visitant was as little desirous of prying into the secret, as the cardinal, nothing could be more easily counterfeited: "And "the witnesses very numerous, and all of "them, *in a manner*, spectators of the fact, "to which they gave their testimony." By the *very numerous witnesses*, I suppose he means the whole company in town, who were appealed to. They were all, *in a manner*, spectators of the fact. What precise abatement the author intended we should make, from the sense of the word *spectators*, on account of the qualifying phrase *in a manner*, I shall not presume to determine; but shall observe, from the memoirs, that it was not so much as pretended by the canons, that any of the citizens had seen the miracle performed; it was only pretended, that they had seen the man formerly at the gate of the church, wanting a leg. Nor is it alleged,

that any of them was at more pains in examining the matter, either before or after the recovery of the leg, than the cardinal was. They were therefore properly no spectators of the fact. The phrase, *in a manner*, ought, I imagine, to have been placed in the end of the sentence, which would have run thus: "to which they, *in a manner*, gave their "testimony:" for no direct testimony was either asked of them, or given by them: their belief is inferred from their devotion.

I have been the more particular in my remarks on the circumstances of this story, not because there was need of these remarks; for, though to the essayist the relation appeared very *memorable*, to me, and, I believe, to most people, it appears very *trifling;* but that the reader might have this further specimen of the author's talents in embellishing. To the above-mentioned, and all other such idle tales, this short and simple answer will, by every man of sense, be thought sufficient. *The country where the miracle is said to have been wrought, is* SPAIN: *the people who propagated the faith of it were* THE CLERGY. What comparison, in point of credibility, can be made between miracles, which, with no visible support but their own evidence, had at

once to encounter, and did in fact overcome the abhorrence of the priest, and the tyranny of the magistrate, the insolence of the learned, and the bigotry of the superstitious: what comparison, I say, can be made between such, and any prodigies said to have been performed in a country, where all the powers of the nation, secular and ecclesiastical, the literature of the schools, such as it is, and the prejudices of the people, conspire in establishing their credit; a country sunk in the most obdurate superstition that ever disgraced human nature,* a country where the awe of the in-

* This perhaps will appear to some to be too severe a censure on a country called Christian, and may be thought to reflect on Christianity itself. I do not think it fairly capable of such a construction. That the corruption of the best things produces the worst, hath grown into a proverb; and, on the most impartial inquiry, I do not imagine it will be found, that any species of idolatry ever tended so directly to extirpate humanity, gratitude, natural affection, equity, mutual confidence, good faith, and every amiable and generous principle from the human breast, as that gross perversion of the Christian religion which is established in Spain. It might easily be shewn, that the human sacrifices offered by Heathens, had not half the tendency to corrupt the heart, and consequently deserve not to be viewed with half the horror as those celebrated among

quisition is so great, that no person, whatever be his sentiments, dares mutter a syllable against any opinion that hath obtained the patronage of their spiritual guides? But that I may not be accused of prepossession, or suspected of exaggerating, I shall only give the sentiments of two eminent foreigners (who were not Protestants, and may therefore be supposed the more impartial), concerning that nation, and the influence which the holy tribunal has both on their character and manners. Voltaire,* speaking of the inquisition as established in Spain, says, "their form of "proceeding is an infallible way to destroy "whomsoever the inquisitors please. The "prisoners are not confronted with the in-

among the Spaniards, with so much pomp, and barbarous festivity, at an *auto da fe*. It will not surely be affirmed, that our Saviour reflected on the Mosaic institution, or genuine Judaism, when he said, *Wo unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for ye compass sea and land to make one prosylete, and when he is made* YE MAKE *him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves*. Yet the words plainly imply, that even *Pagans*, by being converted to the *Judaism* that was then professed, were *made* children of hell, and consequently corrupted, instead of being reformed. See Matth. xxiii, 15.

* Essai sur l'Histoire Générale, chap. 118.

" formers; and there is no informer who is " not listened to. A public criminal, an in- " famous person, a child, a prostitute, are " creditable accusers. Even the son may de- " pose against his father; the wife against " her husband. In fine, the prisoner is com- " pelled to inform against himself, to divine, " and to confess the crime laid to his charge; " of which often he is ignorant. This pro- " cedure, unheard of till the institution of " this court, makes the whole kingdom trem- " ble. Suspicion reigns in every breast. Friend- " ship and openness are at an end. The bro- " ther dreads his brother, the father his son. " Hence taciturnity is become the character- " istic of a nation endued with all the vivaci- " ty natural to the inhabitants of a warm and " fruitful climate. To this tribunal we must " likewise impute that profound ignorance of " sound philosophy, in which Spain lies buri- " ed, whilst Germany, England, France, " and even Italy, have discovered so many " truths, and enlarged the sphere of our " knowledge. Never is human nature so de- " based, as when ignorance is armed with " power." " It is necessary," says Montes- quieu,* in the humble remonstrance to the

* De l'Esprit des Loix, liv. 25, chap.

inquisitors of Spain and Portugal, "that we "advertise you of one thing; it is, that if "any person, in future times, shall dare as- "sert, that, in the age wherein we live, the "Europeans were civilized, you will be "quoted to prove that they were barbari- "ans, and the idea people will form of you, "will be such as will dishonour your age, "and bring hatred on all your contempora- "ries."

I COME now to consider the miracles said to have been performed in the churchyard of S[t]. Medard, at the tomb of *Abbé* Paris. On these the author hath expatiated with great parade, exulting, that he hath found in them, as he imagines, what, in respect of number, and nature, and evidence, may outvie the miracles of Holy writ. Yet should we admit them to be true, how they can be considered as proofs of any doctrine, or how they can affect the evidence of the miracles recorded in scripture, it will not perhaps be easy to discover. But setting that question aside, I propose to examine their evidence; and that, not by entering into a particular inquiry concerning each separate fact mentioned in Montgeron's collection, as such an

inquiry would appear, to every judicious reader, both tedious and impertinent; but by making a few general observations, founded in unquestionable fact, and mostly supported even by the authority of Montgeron, that doughty champion of the Jansenist saint. *

First, Let it be remarked, that it was often objected by the enemies of the saint, and scarce contradicted, never confuted, by his friends, that the prostrations at his sepulchre *produced* more diseases than they *cured*. The ingenious author lately quoted, in the account he gives of the affairs of the church in the ninth century, taking occasion incidentally to mention the miracles of the *Abbé*, speaks of this circumstance as a thing universally known, and undeniable.† "I should not take notice," says he, "of "an epidemical folly with which the "people of Dijon were seized in 844, occasioned by one Saint Benignus, who

* The character of his book is very justly and very briefly expressed in *Le Siecle de Louis* XIV, in these words: "Si ce livre subsistait un jour, et que les autres "fussent perdus, la posterité croirait que notre siecle a "été un tems de barbarie," *chap.* 33.

† Essai sur l'Histoire Générale, chap. 21.

" threw those into convulsions who prayed " on his tomb; I should not, I say, men- " tion this popular superstition, had it not " been furiously revived in our days, in pa- " rallel circumstances. It seems, as if the " same follies were destined to make their " appearance, from time to time, on the " theatre of the world: but good sense is " also the same at all times; and nothing " so judicious hath been said concerning " the modern miracles wrought on the tomb " of I know not what deacon at Paris, as " what a bishop of Lyons said concerning " those of Dijon. *A strange saint indeed,* " *that maims those who pay their devoirs to* " *him. I should think, miracles ought to be* " *performed for the curing, and not for the in-* " *flicting of maladies.*"

The *second* observation is, That the instances of persons cured are extremely *few*, compared with the multitudes of people in distress, who night and day attended the sepulchre, imploring in vain the intercession of the saint. The crowds of sick and infirm, who flocked to the tomb for relief, were, by all accounts, innumerable: whereas all the cures which the zealous and indefatigable Montgeron could procure vouchers of, a-

mounted only to NINE.* The author, therefore, must be understood, as speaking with great latitude, when he says, "There "surely never was so great a number of "miracles ascribed to one person, as those "which were lately said to have been wrought "in France, upon the tomb of *Abbé* Paris, "the famous Jansenist, with whose sanctity "the people were so long deluded."† If *thousands* of diseased persons had applied for medicine to some ignorant quack, in the assurance of his extraordinary abilities, would it be matter of surprise to a reasonable man, that, of so many, *eight* or *nine* should be found, whose distempers had taken a favourable turn, whilst they were using his specifics, and had thereby given countenance to the delusion? I think it would be matter of surprise that there were so few.

* It must be owned that the author of the *Recueil* after mentioned, hath presented us with a much greater number; but let it be remarked, that that author doth not confine himself to the cures performed openly at the tomb of the *deacon;* he gives us also those that were wrought in the private chambers of the sick, by virtue of his relics, by images of him, or by earth brought from under his monument. Nor is the collection restricted only to the cures effected by the saint; it includes also the judgments inflicted by him.

† P. 195.

I shall observe, *thirdly*, That *imposture* was actually detected, and proved in several instances. That the reader may be satisfied of this, I must entreat him to have recourse to the Archbishop of Sens' *Pastoral Instruction*; a book which Mr. Hume could not, with propriety, take any notice of, having positively asserted, that "the enemies to those opinions, "in whose favour the miracles were said to "have been wrought, were never able distinctly to refute or detect them." * This prelate, on the contrary, hath not only given a distinct refutation of some of these pretended miracles, but hath clearly detected the deceit and little artifices by which their credit was supported. I intend not to descend to particulars, and shall therefore only refer the reader to the book itself, and beg that he will peruse what relates to the cases of *Jacques Laurent Menedrieux*, *Jean Nivet*, *Sieur le Doulx*, *Laleu*, *Anne Coulon*, the widow *de Lorme*, as well as *Mademoiselle le Franc*, of whom the essayist hath made mention in a note. In this perusal, the reader will observe the shameful prevarications of some Jansenist witnesses, for whom Mr. Hume would fain apologize, by telling us pleasantly, they were

* P. 195.

tampered with. * I shall only add on this head, that the detection of fraud in some instances, justly brings suspicion on all the other instances. A man whom I know to have lied to me, on several occasions, I shall suspect, on every occasion, where I have not access to discover, whether what he affirms be true or false. It is in the same way we judge of the spirit and conduct of parties, as of individuals.

I observe, *fourthly*, That all the cures recorded by Montgeron, as duly attested, were such as might have been effected by *natural* means. There are two kinds of miracles, to which Mr. Hume hath alluded in a note, though he does not directly make the distinction. One is, when the event, considered by itself, is evidently *preternatural.* Of this kind are, raising the dead, walking on water, making whole the maimed; for by no natural causes can these effects be produced. The other kind is, when the event, considered by itself, is *natural*, that is, may be produced by natural causes, but is denominated miraculous, on account of the manner. That a sick person should be restored to health, is not, when considered singly, preternatural;

* P. 197, in the note.

but that health should be restored by the command of a man, undoubtedly is. Let us hear the author on this point: "Sometimes an event may not, *in itself*, *seem* to be contrary to the laws of nature, and yet, if it were real, it might, by reason of some circumstances, be denominated a miracle; because, *in fact*, it is contrary to these laws. Thus, if a person claiming a divine authority, should command a sick person to be well, a healthful man to fall down dead, the clouds to pour rain, the winds to blow, in short, should order many natural events, which immediately follow upon his command; these might justly be esteemed miracles, because they are really, in this case, contrary to the laws of nature. For if any suspicion remain, that the event and command concurred by accident, there is no miracle, and no transgression of the laws of nature. If this suspicion be removed, there is evidently a miracle, and a transgression of these laws; because nothing can be more contrary to nature, than that the voice or command of a man should have such an influence."* From what hath been said, it appears, that these

* P. 181, in the note.

two kinds of miracles must differ considerably in respect of evidence, since the latter naturally gives room for a suspicion, which is absolutely excluded from the former. In the former, when the fact or event is proved, the miracle is unquestionable. In the latter, the fact may be proved, and yet the miracle may be justly questioned. It therefore merits our attention, that all the miracles recorded in Montgeron's collection, were of the second kind. One of the most considerable of those cures, was that of Don Alphonso de Palacios, who had lost one eye, and was distressed with an inflammation in the other. The inflamed eye was cured, but the lost eye was not restored. Had there been a reproduction of the member which had perished, a sufficient proof of the fact would have been a sufficient proof of the miracle. But as the case was otherwise, the fact vouched may be admitted, without admitting any miracle. The cures said to have been performed on those patients who were afflicted with paralytic or dropsical disorders, or that performed on Louisa Coirin, who had a tumour on her breast, will not appear to be entitled to a rank in the first class. As little can the cure of Peter Gautier claim that honour. One of his eyes had been

ricked with an awl; in consequence of which he aqueous humour dropped out, and he ecame blind of that eye. His sight was retored, whilst he paid his addresses to the *Abbé*. But that a puncture in the cornea of he eye will often heal of itself, and that the queous humour, after it hath been quite lost, vill be recruited, and consequently, that the aculty of vision will, in such a case, be recoered, is what every oculist can assure us of. The loss of the watery humour, is the contant effect of a very common operation in urgery, couching the cataract. Hence we nay learn, how we ought to understand these vords of the author, "The curing of the 'sick, giving hearing to the deaf, and sight 'to the blind, were everywhere talked of, as 'the usual effects of that holy sepulchre."* As therefore the alleged miracles were all of he second class, it is only from the attendant circumstances we can judge, whether the acts, though acknowledged, were miraculous or not.

In order to enlighten us on this point, I observe, *fifthly*, That none of the cures were *instantaneous*. We have not indeed the same hold of the deceased *Abbé*, as of a living pro-

* P. 195.

phet, who pretends to work miracles. Those who attend the latter, can know exactly, to whom he grants the benefit of his miraculous aid. They can judge also, whether the supplicant's recovery be coincident, with the prophet's volition or command. In the former case, we have not access to judge of either; and consequently, there is much greater scope for fancy and credulity to operate. No voice was ever said to have proceeded from the tomb of the blessed deacon, as his votaries styled him. They obtained no audible answer to their prayers. There are, however, some circumstances, by which a probable conjecture may be made concerning the efficiency of the saint in the cures ascribed to him. One is, if the cure instantaneously followed the first devotions at the tomb. Supernatural cures differ, in this particular, as much as in any other, from those which are effected by natural means, that they are not *gradually*, but *instantly*, perfected. Now, of which kind were the cures of S^{t}. Medard? From the accounts that are given, it is evident, that they were *gradual*. That some of them were *sudden*, is alleged; but that any of them were *instantaneous*, or immediately followed the first application, is not even pretended. All

worshippers at the tomb, persisted for
, several of them for *weeks*, and some for
ths successively, daily imploring the inter-
ion of the *Abbé*, before they received re-
from their complaints; and the relief
:h was received, is, in most cases, ac-
wledged to have been gradual.

observe, *sixthly*, That most of the devo-
either had been using *medicines* before,
continued to use them, during their ap-
itions to the saint; or, that their distem-
had *abated*, before they determined to so-
his help. That the Spanish youth had
ı using, all the while, a medicine prescrib-
y an eminent oculist, was proved by the
ositions of witnesses; that Gautier had be-
to recover his sight, before he had re-
se to the sepulchre, was attested, not on-
y his uncle, but even by himself, when,
he Archbishop of Sens informs us, he
ed a recantation of what he had formerly
nced. With regard to the rest, it ap-
s at least probable, from the circumstan-
of the proof, that they were using the pre-
otions of the physicians, whom they had
ulted before applying to the deacon, and
were afterwards required to give their

testimony, concerning the nature and malignancy of the different diseases.

The *seventh* observation is, That some of the cures attested were *incomplete*. This was manifestly the case of the Spaniard, who was relieved only from the most inconsiderable part of his complaint. Even the cure of *Mademoiselle* Thibault, which was as great a subject of exultation to the partisans of the *Abbé* as any other, was not complete. Not only was she confined to her bed, for many days, after the decrease of her dropsy; but she still remained incapable of moving two of her fingers. Silva, physician to the Duke of Orleans, attested this; adding expressly, that he *could not look on her as being cured.*

The *eighth* and last observation I shall make on this subject, is, That the relief granted some of them was but *temporary.* This was clearly proved to be the case of the Spanish gentleman. That soon after his return home, he relapsed into his former malady, the prelate I have often quoted, hath, by the certificates and letters which he procured from Madrid, put beyond controversy. Among these, there are letters from a Spanish grandee, Don Francis Xavi-

er, and from the patient's uncle, besides a certificate signed by himself.

After the above observations, I believe, there will be no occasion for saying much on this subject. The author has, in a note, artfully enough pointed out his aim, that it might not be overlooked by the careless reader.* "There is another book," says he, "in three volumes (called *Recueil des "Miracles de l'Abbé Paris*), giving an ac- "count of many of these miracles, and ac- "companied with prefatory discourses, which "are very well wrote."† He adds, "There

* P. 196.

† I am surprised that Mr. Hume hath taken no notice of the profound erudition displayed in the *Recueil*, as I imagine its author is much more eminent for this, than for his talent in writing. Besides, his learning deserves our regard the more, that it is of a kind rarely to be met with in the present century. Where shall we find in these dregs of the ages, to adopt his own emphatical expression, such an extensive knowledge, as he hath exhibited, of all the monkish and legendary writings of the darkest and most barbarous, or, according to him, the most devout ages of the church? Or whence else, but from those productions, could he have selected such admirable materials for his work? The lives and writings of the saints are an inexhaustible treasure for a performance of this kind. It is true, St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John, have said

" dence for the latter is equal to that for " the former."* At first reading, one is

" God convert many sinners, and cure many sick, by slow " degrees, at the same time that he shows by some " more shining examples, that his arm is not shorten- " ed."

* I am sorry to be again so soon laid under the necessity of observing, that the essayist, by confiding too much in his memory, often injures the writers whom he quotes. It is but doing justice to the author of the *Recueil*, to observe, that he hath, in no part of his performance, asserted that the evidence for the miracles of Monsieur de Paris is equal to that for the miracles of Jesus Christ. Perhaps my reader will be surprised when I tell him, for I own I was exceedingly surprised when I discovered, that he hath not only in the plainest terms asserted, but strenuously maintained, the contrary. And for this purpose he hath employed no less than twelve pages of his work. He introduces the subject (Discourse 2, part 1), with observing, that he and the rest of his party had been traduced by their adversaries, as equalling the miracles of the deacon to those of our Saviour. The impiety of such a comparison he even mentions with horror, and treats the charge as an absolute calumny. Hence he takes occasion to enumerate those peculiar circumstances in the miracles of our Lord, which gave them an eminent superiority, not only over those of his saint, but over those of every other saint, or prophet whatsoever. To this enumeration he subjoins, Tous ceux qui recourent à Monsieur de Paris ne sont pas guéris, nous dit-on; plusieurs ne le sont qu'en partie, ou d'une maniere lente, et moins éclatante;

apt, with surprise, to imagine, that the author is going to make some atonement for

éclatante; il n'a point ressuscité de mortis. Que s'ensuit-il de-là, sinon que les miracles que Dieu a opérés par lui sont inférieurs à ceux que nôtre Seigneur a opérés par lui-mme? Nous l'avouons, nous incolquons cette vérité. " All those, we are told, who recur to " Monsieur de Paris are not cured; several are cured " but in part, or in a slow and less striking manner; " he hath raised no dead. What follows, unless that " the miracles which God wrought by him, are infe- " rior to those which our Lord wrought by himself? " We acknowledge, we inculcate this truth." Afterwards, speaking of evidence, he owns also, that the miracles of the deacon are not equally certain with those of Jesus Christ. The latter, he says, are more certain in many respects. He specifies the natural notoriety of some of the facts, the public and instantaneous manner in which most of them were effected, the number, the quality, the constancy of the witnesses, and the forced acknowledgment of his most spiteful enemies. He concludes this subject in these memorable terms: Au reste ce que je viens d'exposer sur la supeiorité des merveilles opérés par le Sauveur, je l'avois reconnu avec plaisir dans le premier discours. J'y ai dit en propres termes, qu'il y avoit *une difference infinie entre les miracles de Jesus Christ et ceux de Monsieur de Paris.* J'ai promis de ne jamais oublier cette difference, et j'ai tenu parole. J'ai remarqué, dans le lieu où il convenoit de le faire, que cette difference infinie regardoit *l'evidence* des prodiges, aussi bien que leur *grandeur;* et que les incredules pouvoient nous dire,

the tenets of the essay, by turning advocate for the miracles of Jesus Christ; and by shewing, that these are not affected by his doctrine. But on this point we are not long

que ceux que nous produisions n'ont point le même eclat qu'ont eu ceux de nôtre Seigneur. " Finally, " what I have just now evinced on the superiority of " the wonders performed by our Lord, I had acknow- " ledged with pleasure in the first discourse. I said " there, in express terms, that there was *an infinite differ-* " *ence between the miracles of Jesus Christ and those of Mon-* " *sieur de Paris.* I promised never to forget this dif- " ference, and I have kept my promise. I remarked " in its proper place, that this infinite difference re- " garded the *evidence* as well as the *greatness* of the " prodigies; and that the incredulous might object, " that those which we produce, have not the same " lustre with those of our Saviour." I have been the more particular on this point, not so much to vindicate the author of the *Recueil* as to shew the sense which even the most bigotted partizans of the holy deacon had of the difference between the miracles ascribed to him, and those performed by our Lord. I cannot avoid remarking also another difference, I mean that which appears between the sentiments of this author as expressed by himself, and his sentiments as reported by the essayist. It is indeed, Mr. Hume, a judicious observation you have given us; that we ought to " lend " a very academic faith to every report which favours " the passion of the reporter; in whatever way it strikes " in with his natural inclinations and propensities." P. 200.

held in suspense. He subjoins, " As if the " testimony of men could ever be put in the " balance with that of God himself, who " conducted the pen of the inspired writ- " ers." An ingenious piece of raillery without question. Is it possible, in a politer manner, or in more obliging terms, to tell the Christian world, *They are fools:* and that all who are silly enough to believe the miracles recorded in scripture, are not entitled to be argued with as men? How? They are so absurd as to believe the scriptures to be the word of God, on the evidence of the miracles wrought by our Lord and his apostles; and that these miracles were wrought, they could not believe on any testimony, less than that of God, reporting them in the scriptures; and thus, by making inspiration and miracles reciprocally foundations to each other, they, in effect, admit both without any foundation at all. After this handsome compliment to the friends of holy writ, he thinks himself at liberty to be very explicit on the comparative evidence of the miracles of the *Abbé*, and those of Jesus: " If these writers " indeed were to be considered merely as " human testimony, the French author is " *very moderate* in his comparison, since he

" might, *with some appearance of reason*, pre-
" tend, that the Jansenist miracles *much sur-*
" *pass* the other, in evidence and authority."
Was ever so rough an assault preceded by so smooth, but so insidious a preamble? Is it then still the fate of Jesus to be betrayed with a kiss? But notwithstanding this author's declaration, no Christian will have reason to dread the issue of the comparison. Mr. Hume hath not entered on particulars, neither shall I enter on them. I should not incline to tire my reader with repetitions, which, in a minute inquiry, would be inevitable. I shall therefore only desire him, if he think it needful, to peruse a second time the eight foregoing observations. Let him try the miracles of our Lord by this touch-stone; and I persuade myself, he will be satisfied, that there is *no appearance of reason* to pretend, that the Jansenist miracles *much surpass* the other, or even equal them, in evidence and authority.

The author triumphs not a little in the observation, that the reports of the prodigies performed by the deacon, were violently opposed by the civil magistrate, and by the Jesuits, the most learned society in the kingdom. He could see the importance of this

circumstance in the case of *Abbé* Paris, though not in the case of Jesus Christ. But that the difference of the cases, as well as their resemblance, may better appear, it ought likewise to be observed, that Jansenism, though not the *ruling* faction, was at that time the *popular* faction; that this popularity was not the effect of the miracles of the *Abbé*, but antecedent to these miracles; that, on the contrary, the Jesuits were extremely *upopular*; and that many, who had no more faith in the miracles of S^t^. Medard than Mr. Hume hath, were well pleased to connive at a delusion, which at once plagued and mortified a body of men, that were become almost universally odious.

I shall only add, that nothing could more effectually expose the folly of those pretensions, than the expedient by which they were made to cease. In consequence of an order from the king, the sepulchre was inclosed with a wall, and the votaries were debarred from approaching the tomb. The author says in relation to this,* "No Jansenist was "ever embarrassed to account for the ces-"sation of the miracles, when the church-"yard was shut up by the king's edict."

* P. 198, in the note.

Certain it is, that "God is master of his "own graces and works." But it is equally certain, that neither reason nor the gospel leads us to think, that any human expedient will prove successful, which is calculated to frustrate the decrees of Heaven. Both, on the contrary, teach us, that men never more directly *promote* the designs of their Maker, than when they intend directly to *oppose* them. It was not thus, that either Pharisees or Sadducees, Jews or Gentiles, succeeded in their opposition to the miracles of Jesus and his apostles. The opinion of Gamaliel* was undoubtedly judicious: *If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought; but if it be of God, ye* CANNOT *overthrow it; beware, therefore, lest ye be found fighting even against God.* To conclude, Did the Jansenist cause derive any advantage from those pretended miracles? None at all. It even suffered by them. It is justly remarked by Voltaire,† that "the tomb of the deacon Paris "proved in effect, in the minds of all peo"ple of sense, the tomb of Jansenism." How unlike in all respects the miracles recorded by the Evangelists!

* Acts v, 38, 39.

† Seicle de Louis XIV, chap. 33.

THUS I have briefly inquired into the nature and evidence, first of the *Pagan*, and next of the *Popish* miracles mentioned by Mr. Hume; and have, I hope, sufficiently evinced, that the miracles of the New Testament can suffer nothing by the comparison; that, on the contrary, as in painting, the shades serve to heighten the glow of the colours; and, in music, the discords to set off the sweetness of the harmony; so the value of these genuine miracles is enhanced by the contrast of those paltry counterfeits.

SECT. VI.

Abstracting from the evidence for particular facts, we have irrefragable evidence, that there have been miracles in former times; or such events as, when compared with the present constitution of the world, would by Mr. Hume be denominated miraculous.

I READILY concur with Mr. Hume, in maintaining, that when, merely by the force of REASON, we attempt to investigate the *origin of worlds*,* we get beyond our sphere, and

* Essay 12. Of the academical or sceptical philosophy, part 3.

must infallibly bewilder ourselves in hypothesis and conjecture. REASON indeed (which vainly boasts her all-sufficiency), hath sometimes pretended to carry men to this amazing height. But there is ground to suspect, that in such instances, the ascent of *reason*, as the author elegantly expresseth it,* hath been aided by the wings of *imagination*. If we will not be indebted to REVELATION for our knowledge of this article, we must, for aught I can perceive, be satisfied to live in ignorance. There is, however, one question distinct from the former, though a-kin to it, which, even from the principles of reason, we may with great probability determine. The question I mean is, Whether the world had an origin or not?

That there hath been an infinite, eternal, and independent series of finite, successive, and dependent beings, such as men, and consequently, that the world had no beginning, appears, from the bare consideration of the thing, extremely incredible, if not altogether absurd. The abstract argument used on this head, might appear too metaphysical and refined: I shall not therefore introduce it; but

* Essay 11. Of a particular providence and future state.

recur to topics, which are more familiar, which, though they do not demonstrate it is absolutely impossible that *the world existed from eternity*, clearly evince, that highly improbable, or rather, certainly . These topics I shall only mention, as are pretty obvious, and have been often d with great energy by the learned, both ent and modern. Such are the late in- ion of letters, and of all the sciences and by which human life is civilized; the wn origin of most nations, states, and doms; and the first peopling of many ntries. It is in our power at present to e the history of every people backwards, imes of the greatest barbarity and igno- e. Europe, though not the largest of the parts into which the earth is divided, is, many accounts, the most considerable. what a different face doth Europe wear present, from what it wore three thousand rs ago? How immense the odds in know- ge, in arts, in policy, in every thing? How y is the intercourse, and how extensive the uaintance, which men can now enjoy h all, even the remotest regions of the be, compared with what was, or could e been enjoyed, in that time of darkness

and simplicity? A man differs not more from a child than the human race now differs from the human race then. Three thousand years ago, appear indeed to mark a very distant epoch; and yet it is but as yesterday, compared with eternity. This, when duly weighed, every thinking person will acknowledge to be as strong moral evidence, as the subject can admit (and that I imagine is very strong), that the world had a beginning.

I shall make a supposition, which will perhaps appear whimsical, but which will tend to elucidate the argument I am enforcing. In antediluvian times, when the longevity of man was such as to include some centuries, I shall suppose, that a few boys had been transported to a desert island, and there left together, just old enough to make shift to sustain themselves, as those in the golden age are fabled to have done, on acorns, and other spontaneous productions of the soil. I shall suppose, that they had lived there for some hundreds of years, had remembered nothing of their coming into the island, nor of any other person whatsoever; and that thus they had never had access to know, or hear, of either birth or death. I shall suppose them to enter into a serious disquisition concerning

their own duration, the question having been started, Whether they had existed from eternity, or had once begun to be? They recur to memory: but memory can furnish them with nothing certain or decisive. If it must be allowed, that it contains no trace of a beginning of existence, it must also be allowed, that it reaches not beyond a few centuries at most. They observe besides, concerning this faculty, that the further back it goes, it becomes the more indistinct, terminating at last in confusion and darkness. Some things, however, they distinctly recollect, and are assured of. They remember, that they were once of much lower stature, and of smaller size; they had less bodily strength; and all their mental faculties were weaker. They know, that, in the powers of body and mind, they have advanced, by imperceptible degrees, to the pitch they are now arrived at. These considerations, especially when fortified by some analogous observations they might have made, on the growth of herbs and trees, would have shewn the probability to be entirely on the side of those who asserted, that their existence had a beginning: And though, on account of the narrow sphere of their knowledge and experience, the argu-

ment could not have appeared to them in all its strength, we, from our larger acquaintance with nature, even abstracting from our knowledge of man in particular, must be satisfied, that it would have been strictly analogical and just. Exactly *similar*, the very *same*, I should rather say, is the argument I have been urging for the origination of the species. Make but a few alterations in phraseology; for *memory*, substitute *history and tradition*; for *hundreds* of years, say *thousands*; for *the powers of body and mind*, put *the arts and sciences*; and, with these, and perhaps one or two more such variations, you will find the argument as applicable in the one case, as in the other. Now, if it be granted, that the human species must have had a beginning, it will hardly be questioned, that every other animal species, or even that the universe, must have had a beginning.

BUT in order to prove the proposition laid down in the title of this section, it is not necessary to suppose that the world had a beginning. Admit it had not, and observe the consequence. Thus much must be admitted also, that not barely for a *long continued*, but for an ETERNAL succession of generations,

mankind were in a state little superior to the beasts; that of a sudden, there came a most astonishing change upon the species; that they exerted talents and capacities, of which there appeared not the smallest vestige, during the eternity preceding; that they acquired such knowledge as procured them a kind of empire, not only over the vegetable and animal worlds, but even, in some respect, over the elements, and all the unwieldy powers of matter; that, in consequence of this, they were quickly raised, much more above the state they had been formerly and eternally in, than such their former and eternal state was above that of the brute creation. If such a revolution in nature, such a thorough, general, and sudden change as this, would not be denominated miraculous, it is not in my power to conceive what would. I could not esteem it a greater miracle, hardly so great, that any species of beasts, which have hitherto been doomed to tread the earth, should now get wings, and float about in the air.

Nor will this plea be subverted by that trite objection, that mankind may have been as much enlightened, perhaps myriads of years ago, as they are at present; but that by some *universal* calamity, such as de-

luge or conflagration, which, after the rotation of many centuries, the earth possibly becomes liable to, all traces of erudition and of science, all traces both of the elegant and of the useful arts, may have been effaced, and the human race, springing from a few who had escaped the common ruin, may have emerged anew, out of barbarity and ignorance. This hypothesis doth but substitute one miracle in the place of another. Such general disorder is entirely unconformable to our experience of the course of nature. Accordingly the destruction of the world by a deluge, the author hath numbered among those prodigies, or miracles, which render the Pentateuch perfectly incredible.

If, on the contrary, we admit, that the world had a beginning, (and will not every thinking person acknowledge, that this position is much more probable than the contrary?) the production of the world must be ascribed either to *chance*, or to *intelligence.*

Shall we derive all things, spiritual and corporeal, from a principal so insignificant as blind *chance?* Shall we say, with Epicu-

rus, that the fortuitous concourse of rambling atoms hath reared this beautiful and stupendous fabric? In that case, perhaps, we should give an account of the origin of things, which, most people will think, could not properly be styled miraculous. But is it, because the formation of a grand and regular system in this way, is conformable to the experienced order of nature? Quite the reverse. Nothing can be more repugnant to universal experience, than that the least organic body, not to mention the glorious frame of nature, should be produced by such a casual jumble. It has, therefore, in the highest degree possible, that particular quality of miracles, from which, according to the author's theory, their incredibility results, and may doubtless, in this loose acceptation of the word, be termed *miraculous*. But should we affirm, that, to account thus for the origin of the universe, is to account for it by miracle; we should be thought, I am afraid, to speak both weakly and improperly. There is something here, if I may so express myself, which is far beyond the miraculous; something, for which I know not whether any language can afford a proper appellation, unless it be

the general appellations of *absurdity* and *non sense.*

Shall we then at last recur to the common doctrine, that the world was produced by an *intelligent cause?* On this supposition also, though incomparably the most rational it is evident, that in the creation, formation or first production of things, call it by what name you please, a power must have been exerted, which, in respect of the present course of nature, may be styled *miraculous.* I intend not to dispute about a word, nor to inquire, whether that term can, in strict propriety, be used of any exertions before the establishment of the laws of nature. I use the word in the same latitude, in which the author commonly useth it in his reasoning, for every event, that is not conformable to the course of nature with which we are acquainted by experience.

WHETHER, therefore, the world *had,* or *had not, a beginning;* whether, on the *first* supposition, the production of things be ascribed to *chance* or to *design;* whether, on the *second,* in order to solve the numberless objections that arise, we *do,* or *do not,* recur to universal *catastrophes;* there is no possibility

ty of accounting for the phenomena that presently come under our notice, without having at last recourse to MIRACLES; that is, to events altogether unconformable, or, if you will, contrary to the present course of nature known to us by experience. I cannot conceive any hypothesis, which is not reducible to one or other of those above mentioned. Whoever imagines, that another might be framed, which is not comprehended in any of those, and which hath not as yet been devised by any system-builder; let him make the experiment, and I will venture to prognosticate, that he will still find himself clogged with the same difficulty. The conclusion therefore above deduced, may be justly deemed, till the contrary is shown, to be not only the result of one, but alike of every hypothesis, of which the subject is susceptible.

THUS it hath been evinced, as was proposed, that abstracting from the evidence for particular facts, we have irrefragable evidence, that there have been, that there must have been, *miracles* in former times, or such events, as, when compared with the present constitution of the world, would by Mr. Hume be denominated miraculous.

SECT. VII.

Revisal of Mr. Hume's examination of the Pentateuch.

ALLOWING to the conclusion deduced in the foregoing section its proper weight, I shall also take into consideration the *Pentateuch*, or five books of Moses; or rather, I shall endeavour impartially to revise the examination which those books have already undergone by the essayist.* It is, in this case, of the greatest importance to know, whether the evidence on both sides hath been fairly stated.

"HERE then we are at first to consider "a book," which is acknowledged, on all hands, to be the most ancient record in the world, "presented to us," we admit, "by a "barbarous and ignorant people,"† at the same time exhibiting a system of *Theism*, or

* P. 205.

† The author adds, "wrote in an age when they "were still more barbarous." These words I have omitted in the revisal, because they appear to me unintelligible. The age in which the Pentateuch was written, is indirectly compared to another age, he says not what: and all we can make of it is, that this people were more barbarous at that time than at some other time, nobody knows when.

natural religion, which is both rational and sublime; with which nothing that was ever compiled or produced, on this subject, in the most enlightened ages, by the most learned and polished nations, who were unacquainted with that book, will bear to be compared.

Mr. Hume himself must allow, that this remark deserves attention, since his reasoning in another performance, which he calls *The Natural History of Religion*, would lead us to expect the contrary. He there maintains, that *Polytheism* and *Idolatry* are, and must be, the religion of rude and barbarous, and consequently of ancient ages; that the true principles of *Theism*, or the belief of one Almighty and Wise Being, the Creator, the Preserver, and the Ruler of heaven and earth, results from the greatest improvements of the understanding in philosophy and science. To suppose the contrary, says he, is supposing, that "while men were ignorant and barbarous, "they discovered truth; but fell into error, "as soon as they acquired learning and po-"liteness."* This reasoning is just, wherever religion is to be considered as the result of human reflections. What account then

* Natural History of Religion, I.

will the author give of this wonderful exception? That the reverse is here the case, it is impossible for him to dissemble. The people he himself calls ignorant and barbarous; yet they are not idolaters or polytheists. At the time when the book, which he examines, was composed, he seems to think, they even exceeded themselves in barbarity; yet the sentiments of these barbarians, on the subject of religion, the sentiments which that very book presents to us, may well put to silence the wisdom of the politest nations on the earth. Need I remind Mr. Hume of his express declaration, that if a traveller were transported into any unknown region, and found the inhabitants "ignorant and barbarous, he might before-"hand declare them idolaters, and there is "*scarce* a POSSIBILITY of his being mistak-"en?"* I know no satisfactory account that can be given of this exception, on the principles of the essayist. Nevertheless, nothing is more easy, than to give a satisfactory account of it, on the Christian principles. This account is that which is given by the book itself. It is, that the religious tenets of that nation were not the result of

* Natural History of Religion, I.

their reasonings, but proceeded from divine revelation. The contrast we discern betwixt the ISRAELITES, and the ancient GREEKS and ROMANS is remarkable. The GREEKS and ROMANS, on all the subjects of human erudition, on all the liberal and the useful arts, reasoned like *men*; on the subject of religion, they pratted like *children*. The ISRAELITES, on the contrary, in all the sciences and arts, were *children*; but, in their notions of religion, they were *men*; in the doctrines, for example, of the unity, the eternity, the omnipotence, the omniscience, the omnipresence, the wisdom, and the goodness of God; in their opinions concerning providence, and the creation, preservation, and government of the world; opinions so exalted and comprehensive, as even by the author's acknowledgment, could never enter into the thoughts of barbarians.

But to proceed in the revisal: We have here a book, says the essayist, "wrote in all "probability long after the facts it relates." That this book was written long after *some* of the facts it relates, is not indeed denied; that it was written long after *all*, or even *most* of those facts, I see no reason to believe. If Mr. Hume meant to signify, by the ex-

pression quoted, that this was in all probability the case, why did he not produce the grounds on which the probability is founded? Shall a bold assertion pass for argument? or can it be expected, that any one should consider reasons, which are only in general supposed, but not specified?

He adds, "corroborated by no *concurring* "testimony;" as little, say I, invalidated by any *contradicting* testimony; and both, for this plain reason, because there is no human composition, that can be compared with this, in respect of antiquity. But though this book is not corroborated by the concurrent testimony of any coeval histories, because, if there ever were such histories, they are not now extant; it is not therefore destitute of all collateral evidence. The following examples of this kind of evidence deserve some notice. The division of time into weeks, which hath obtained in many countries, for instance, among the Egyptians, Chinese, Indians, and northern barbarians; nations whereof some had little or no intercourse with others, and were not even known by name to the Hebrews:* the tradition which

* The judicious reader will observe, that there is a great difference between the concurrence of nations in the

in several places prevailed concerning the primeval chaos from which the world arose, the production of all living creatures out of water and earth, by the efficiency of a supreme mind,* the formation of man last of

the division of time into *weeks*, and their concurrence in the other periodical divisions, into *years*, *months*, and *days*. These divisions arise from such natural causes, as are everywhere obvious; the annual and diurnal revolutions of the sun, and the revolution of the moon. The division into *weeks*, on the contrary, seems perfectly arbitrary: consequently its prevailing in distant countries, among nations which had no communication with one another, affords a strong presumption, that it must have been derived from some tradition (as that of the creation) which hath been older than the dispersion of mankind into different regions. It is easy to conceive, that the practice, in rude and barbarous ages, might remain through habit, when the tradition, on which it was founded, was entirely lost; it is easy to conceive, that afterwards, people addicted to idolatry, or who, like the Egyptians, had become proficients in astronomy, should assign to the different days of the week, the names of their deities, or of the planets.

* This in particular merits our attention the more, that it cannot, by any explication, be made to agree with the doctrine which obtained among the Pagans, commonly called *the Mythology*. Ovid is so sensible of this, that, when he mentions a deity as the efficient cause of the creation, he leaves him, as it were, de-

all, in the image of God, and his being vested with dominion over the other animals,

tached from those of the popular system, which it was his business as a poet to deliver, being at a loss what name to give him, or what place in nature to assign him. Quisquis fuit ille deorum. *Whichever of the gods it was.* He well knew that, in all the catalogue of their divinities, the god who made the world was not to be found, that these divinities themselves were, on the contrary, produced out of the chaos, as well as men and beasts. Mr. Hume, in his *Natural History of Religion*, IV, remarks this conduct in Ovid, and ascribes it to his having lived in a learned age, and having been instructed by philosophers in the principle of a divine formation of the world. For my part, I very much question, whether any nation was ever yet indebted, for this principle, to the disquisitions of philosophers. Had this opinion ever been heard of, till the Augustan age, it might indeed have been suspected, that it was the daughter of philosophy and science; but so far is this from being the case, that some vestiges of it may be traced even in the earliest, and most ignorant times. Thales the Milesian, who lived many centuries before Ovid, had, as Cicero, in his first book *De Natura Deorum*, informs us, attributed the origin of all things to God. Anaxagoras had also denominated the forming principle, which severed the elements, created the world, and brought order out of confusion, *intelligence* or *mind*. It is therefore much more probable that these ancients owed this doctrine to a tradition handed down from the earliest ages, which even all the absurdities of the theology they had embraced had

not

the primitive state of innocence and happiness: the subsequent degeneracy of mankind:

not been able totally to erase, though these absurdities could never be made to coalesce with this doctrine. At the same time I acknowledge, that there is something so noble and so rational in the principle, *That the world was produced by an intelligent cause*, that sound philosophy will ever be ready to adopt it, when once it is proposed. But that this opinion is not the offspring of philosophy, may be reasonably deduced from this consideration also, that they were not the most enlightened or philosophic nations, amongst whom it was maintained in greatest purity. I speak not of the Hebrews. Even the Parthians, Medes, and Persians, whom the Greeks considered as barbarians, were genuine theists; and notwithstanding many superstitious practices which prevailed among them, they held the belief of one eternal God, the Creator and Lord of the universe. If this principle is to be derived from the utmost improvement of the mind in ratiocination and science, which is Mr. Hume's hypothesis, the phenomenon just now observed is unaccountable. If, on the contrary, it is to be derived originally from revelation, preserved by tradition, through successive generations, nothing can more easily be accounted for. Traditions are always longest retained, and most purely transmitted, in or near the place where they were first received, and amongst a people who possess a strong attachment to their ancient laws and customs. Migrations into distant countries, mixture of different nations, revolutions in government and manners, yea and ingenuity itself, all contribute to corrupt tradi-

their destruction by a flood: and the preservation of one family in a vessel. Nay, which is still stronger, I might plead the vestiges of some such catastrophe as the deluge, which the shells and other marine bodies, that are daily dug out of the bowels of the earth, in places remote from the sea, do clearly exhibit to us: I might urge the traces, which still remain in the ancient histories, of the migration of people and of science from Asia

tion, and do sometimes wholly efface it. This I take to be the only admissible account, why so rational and so philosophical a principle prevailed most in ages and countries in which reason and philosophy seemed to be but in their infancy. The notion, that the Greeks borrowed their opinions on this subject from the books of Moses; a notion for which some Jewish writers, some Christian fathers, and even some moderns, have warmly contended, appears void of all foundation. These opinions in Greece, as hath been observed, were of a very early date; whereas that there existed such a people as the Jews, seems scarce to have been known there till about the time of the Macedonian conquests. No sooner were they known than they were hated, and their laws and customs universally despised. Nor is there the shadow of reason to think, that the Greeks knew any thing of the sacred writings till a considerable time afterwards, when that version of them was made into their language, which is called *The Translation of the Seventy*.

(which hath not improperly been styled *the cradle of the arts)* into many parts both of Africa and Europe: I might plea the coincidence of those migrations, and of the origin of states and kingdoms, with the time of the dispersion of the posterity of Noah.

But to return, the author subjoins, "resembling those fabulous accounts, which "every nation gives of its origin." It is unluckily the fate of holy writ, with this author, that both its resemblance, and its want of resemblance, to the accounts of other authors, are alike presumptions against it. He hath not indeed told us, wherein it resembles fabulous accounts; and, for my part, though the charge were just, I should imagine little or nothing to the disadvantage of the Pentateuch could be deduced from it. It is universally agreed among the learned, that even the most absurd fables of idolaters, derive their origin from facts, which having been, in barbarous ages, transmitted only by oral tradition, have come at length to be grossly corrupted and disfigured. It is nevertheless probable, that such fictions would still retain some striking features of those truths from which they sprung. And

if the books of Moses resemble, in any thing, the fabulous accounts of other nations, it would not perhaps be difficult to prove, that they resemble only whatever is least fabulous in these accounts. That this will be found to be the case, we may reasonably presume, even from what hath been observed already; and if so, the resemblance, so far from being an argument against those books, is evidently an argument in their favour. In order to remove any doubt that may remain on this head, it ought to be attended to, that, in a number of concurrent testimonies (where there could have been no previous concert), there is a probability independent of that which results from our faith in the witnesses; nay, should the witnesses be of such a character as to merit no faith at all. This probability ariseth from the *concurrence* itself. That such a concurrence should spring from *chance*, is as one to infinite, in other words, morally impossible; if, therefore, concert be excluded, there remains no other cause but the reality of the fact.

It is true, that, "upon reading this book, "we find it full of prodigies and miracles;" but it is also true, that many of those mi-

racles are such, as the subject it treats of must unavoidably make us expect. For a proof of this position, I need but refer the reader to the principles established in the preceding section. No book in the world do we find written in a more simple style; nowhere does there appear in it the least affectation of ornament; yet nowhere else is the Almighty represented, as either acting or speaking in a manner so becoming the eternal Ruler of the world. Compare the account of the CREATION which is given by *Moses*, with the ravings of Sanchoniatho the *Phœnician* philosopher, which he hath dignified with the title of COSMOGONY; or compare it with the childish extravagancies of the *Greek* and the *Latin* poets, so justly likened by the author to *a sick man's dreams*;* and then say, whether any person of candour and discernment will not be disposed to exclaim in the words of the prophet, *What is the* CHAFF *to the* WHEAT!† The account is what we should call, in reference to our experience, *miraculous*. But was it possible it should be otherwise? I believe the greatest infidel will not deny, that it is at

* Natural History of Religion, XV.

† Jer. xxiii, 28.

least as plausible an opinion, that the world had a beginning, as that it had not. If it had, can it be imagined by any man in his senses, that that particular quality should be an objection to the narrative, which he previously knows it must have? Must not the first production of things, the original formation of animals and vegetables, require exertions of power, which, in preservation and propagation, can never be exemplified?

It will perhaps be objected, that if the miracles continued no longer, and extended no further, than the necessity of creation required, this reasoning would be just; but that in fact they both continued much longer, and extended much further. The answer is obvious: It is impossible for us to judge how far the necessity of the case required. Immediately after the creation, things must have been in a state very different from that which they are in at present. How long that state might continue, we have not the means of discovering: but as, in human infancy, it is necessary that the feeble creature should, for some time, be carried in the nurse's arms, and afterwards, by the help of leading-strings, be kept from

falling, before he acquire strength to walk; it is not unlikely, that, in the infancy of the world, such interpositions should be more frequent and requisite, till nature attaining a certain maturity, those laws and that constitution should be established, which we now experience. It will greatly strengthen this conclusion, to reflect, that in every species of natural productions with which we are acquainted, we invariably observe a similar feebleness in the individuals on their first appearance, and a similar gradation towards a state of greater perfection and stability. Besides, if we acknowledge the necessity of the exertion of a power, which only in reference to our experience is called miraculous; the question, as is well observed by the judicious prelate formerly quoted,* "whether this "power stopped immediately, after it had "made man, or went on and exerted itself "farther, is a question of the same kind, as "whether an ordinary power exerted itself "in such a particular degree and manner, or "not." It cannot, therefore, if we think reasonably on this subject, greatly astonish us, that such a book should give "an account "of a state of the world, and of human na-

* Analogy of Religion, &c. part 2, chap. 2, sect 2.

" ture, entirely different from the present;
" of our fall from that state; of the age of
" man extended to near a thousand years;
" and of the destruction of the world by a
" deluge."

Finally, if, in such a book, mingled with the excellencies I have remarked, there should appear some difficulties, some things for which we are not able to account; for instance, " the arbitrary choice of one people, as the " favourites of Heaven; and their deliver- " ance from bondage by prodigies the most " astonishing imaginable;" is there any thing more extraordinary here, than, in a composition of this nature, we might have previously expected to find? We must be immoderately conceited of our own understandings, if we imagine otherwise. Those favourites of Heaven, it must be likewise owned, are the countrymen of the writer; but of such a writer, as of all historians or annalists, ancient or modern, shows the least disposition to flatter his countrymen. Where, I pray, do we find him, either celebrating their virtues, or palliating their vices; either extolling their genius, or magnifying their exploits? Add to all these, that in every thing which is not expressly ascribed to the interposal of Heaven, the relation is in itself plausible, the incidents

are natural, the characters and manners such as are admirably adapted to those early ages of the world. In these particulars, there is no affectation of the marvellous; there are no "descriptions of sea and land monsters; "no relations of wonderful adventures, strange "men, and uncouth manners."*

WHEN all these things are seriously attended to, I persuade myself, that no unprejudiced person will think, that the Pentateuch bears falsehood on the face of it, and deserves to be rejected without examination. On the contrary, every unprejudiced person will find (I say not that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than all the miracles it relates; this is a language which I do not understand, and which only serves to darken a plain question; but I say he will find) very many and very strong indications of authenticity and truth; and will conclude, that all the evidences, both intrinsic and extrinsic, by which it is supported, ought to be impartially canvassed. Abundant evidences there are of both kinds; some hints of them have been given in this section; but to consider them fully, falls not within the limits of my present purpose.

* P. 185.

CONCLUSION.

WHAT is the sum of all that hath been now discussed? It is briefly this: *That the author's favourite argument, of which he boasts the discovery, is founded in error,* is managed with sophistry,† and is at last abandoned by its inventor,‡ as fit only for show, not for use; that he is not more succesful in the collateral arguments he employs; particularly, that there is no peculiar presumption against religious miracles;‖ that, on the contrary, there is a peculiar presumption in their favour;** that the general maxim, whereby he would enable us to decide betwixt opposite miracles, when it is stripped of the pompous diction, that serves it at once for decoration and for disguise, is discovered to be no other than an identical proposition, which, as it conveys no knowledge, can be of no service to the cause of truth;§ that there is no presumption, arising ether from hnman nature,‡‡ or from the history of mankind,‖‖ against the miracles said to have been wrought in proof of*

* Part 1, sect. 1. † Sect 2. ‡ Sect. 3.
‖ Sect. 4. ** Sect. 5. § Sect. 6.
‡‡ Part 2, sect 1. ‖‖ Sect. 2.

Christianity; that the evidence of these is not subverted by those miracles which historians of other religions have recorded; that neither the Pagan,† nor the Popish‡ miracles, on which he hath expatiated, will bear to be compared with those of holy writ; that, abstracting from the evidence for particular facts, we have irrefragable evidence, that there have been miracles in former times;‖ and, lastly, that his examination of the Pentateach is both partial and imperfect, and consequently stands in need of a revisal.§*

"Our most holy religion," says the author in the conclusion of his essay, "is founded "on faith, not on reason; and it is a sure "method of exposing it, to put it to such a "trial, as it is by no means fitted to endure." If, by *our most holy religion*, we are to understand the fundamental articles of the Christian system, these have their foundation in the nature and decrees of God; and, as they are antecedent to our faith or reasonings, they must be also independent of both. If they are true, our disbelief can never make them false; if they are false, the belief of all

* Part 2, sect. 3. † Sect. 4. ‡ Sect. 5.
‖ Sect. 6. § Sect. 7.

the world will never make them true. But as the only question between Mr. Hume and the defenders of the gospel is, Whether there is reason to believe those articles? he can only mean by *our most holy religion*, our belief of the Christian doctrine: and concerning this belief we are told, that it is founded on *faith*, not on reason; that is, our faith is founded on our faith; in other words, it hath no foundation, it is a mere chimera, the creature of a distempered brain. I say not, on the contrary, that *our most holy religion* is founded on *reason*, because this expression, in my opinion, is both ambiguous and inaccurate; but I say, that we have sufficient reason for the belief of our religion; or, to express myself in the words of an apostle, that the Christian, if it is not his own fault, *may be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh* him *a* REASON *of* his *hope*.

So far therefore am I from being afraid of exposing Christianity, by submitting it to the test of reason; so far am I from judging this a trial, which it is by no means fitted to endure, that I think, on the contrary, the most violent attacks that have been made upon the faith of Jesus, have been of service to it. Yes: I do not hesitate to affirm, that our re-

ligion hath been indebted to the *attempts*, though not to the *intentions*, of its bitterest enemies. They have tried its strength indeed, and, by trying, they have displayed its strength; and that in so clear a light, as we could never have hoped, without such a trial, to have viewed it in. Let them therefore write, let them argue, and, when arguments fail, even let them cavil against religion as much as they please: I should be heartily sorry, that ever in this island, the asylum of liberty, where the spirit of Christianity is better understood (however defective the inhabitants are in the observance of its precepts) than in any other part of the Christian world; I should, I say, be sorry, that in this island, so great a disservice were done to religion, as to check its adversaries, in any other way, than by returning a candid answer to their objections. I must at the same time acknowledge, that I am both ashamed and grieved, when I observe any friends of religion, betray so great a diffidence in the goodness of their cause (for to this diffidence it can only be imputed) as to show an inclination for recurring to more forcible methods. The assaults of infidels, I may venture to prophesy, will never overturn our religion. They will

prove not more hurtful to the Christian system, if it is allowed *to compare small things with greatest*, than the boisterous winds are said to prove to the sturdy oak. They shake it impetuously for a time, and loudly threaten its subversion; whilst, in effect, they only serve to make it strike its roots the deeper, and stand the firmer ever after.

One word more with the essayist, and I have done. "Upon the whole," says he, "we "may conclude, that the *Christian religion*, "not only was at first attended with miracles, "but even, at this day, cannot be believed "by any reasonable person without one. "Mere reason is insufficient to convince us "of its veracity; and whoever is moved by "faith to assent to it;" that is, whoever by his belief is induced to believe it, "is conscious "of a continued miracle in his own person, "which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination "to believe, what is most contrary to custom "and experience." An author is never so sure of writing unanswerably, as when he writes altogether unintelligibly. It is impossible that you should fight your enemy before you find him; and if he hath screened himself in dark-

less, it is next to impossible that you should find him. Indeed, if any meaning can be gathered from that strange assemblage of words just now quoted, it seems to be one or other of these which follow; *either*, That there are not any in the world, who believe the gospel; *or*, That there is no want of miracles in our own time. How either of these remarks, if just, can contribute to the author's purpose, it will not, I suspect, be easy to discover. If the second remark is true, if there is no want of miracles at present, surely experience cannot be pleaded against the belief of miracles said to have been performed in time past. Again, if the first remark is true, if there are not any in the world who believe the gospel, because, as Mr. Hume supposeth, a miracle cannot be believed without a new miracle, why all this ado to refute opinions which nobody entertains? Certainly, to use his own words, "The knights-errant, who 'wandered about to clear the world of dra-'gons and giants, never entertained the least 'doubt concerning the existence of these 'monsters."*

* See the first paragraph of Essay 12, of the academical or sceptical philosophy.

Might I presume faintly to copy but t
manner of so inimitable an original, as t
author hath exhibited in his concluding wor
I should also conclude upon the whole, Tl
miracles are capable of proof from testimoi
and that there is a full proof of this kir
for those said to have been wrought in su
port of Christianity; that whoever is mov
by Mr. Hume's ingenious argument, to asse
that no testimony can give sufficient evide
of miracles, admits for *reason*, though p
haps unconscious, a mere *subtilty*, which su
verts the evidence of testimony, of histo
and even of experience itself, giving h
a determination to deny, what the comm
sense of mankind, founded in the prim
principles of the understanding, would le
him to believe.

THE END.

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